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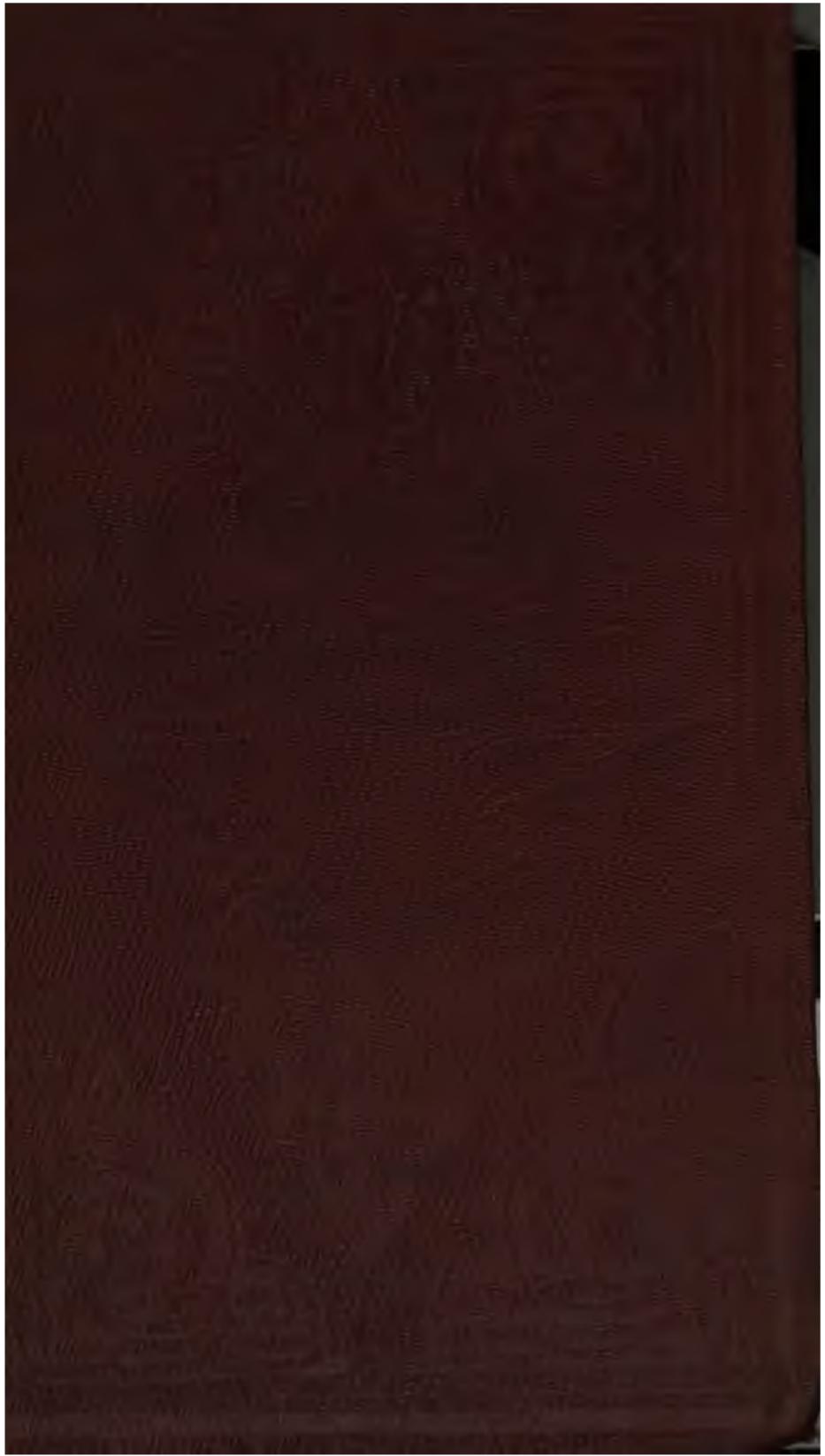
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THE DOUBLE CORONET.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
“MY FIRST SEASON,” “CHARLES AUCHESTER,” &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

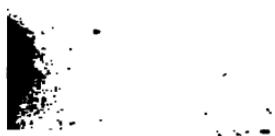
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THE DOUBLE CORONET.

CHAPTER I.

ON a certain afternoon a small party sat at dinner in a lofty banqueting chamber. At one end of the hall a dais reared a sideboard, which was an edifice in bronze, whose mass of modern plate glittered amongst tarnished shields and ancient tankards ; the other end was darkened by a fall of tapestry which hid the entrance door. Four windows hung with fresh orange velvet relieved the sombre ceiling, whose centre, a medallion of the oriental triumphs of Bacchus carved in oak, was bordered with grapes and

ivy, rambling into blossoms and tendrils. The dining table was raised like the sideboard, but round it the marble floor was mantled with the thickest carpets.

The guests were only four in number ; they did not look at home though they made themselves so, nor did any one appear to be the host of the other three. A gentleman at the top of the table was evidently the senior of the rest ; his bald brow was smooth, but lacked the lines of thought and experience which make age venerable ; his eye was bland, his smile agreeable—to a casual glance he might have appeared benevolent, to a searching one he was good natured merely.

He was opposed by a person who did not look like a gentleman, though dressed in faultless style to which his person was a foil ; he had keen but not penetrating eyes, not a bad expression—only vulgar.

The third guest was evidently a clergyman, so habited, and suggesting a family chaplain

by his grave plethoric manner, which blend orthodox assurance with the calm of highly fortunate, if dependent situation.

The fourth and most noticeable person present was a youth, apparently about sixteen. He had neither the bright skin nor compact frame of the English school-boy, indeed but for his dress and smooth cheek, he might have passed for a man very young and very knowing—if not prepossessing he was at least peculiar. His complexion was of sickly fairness, and his very small head gave an equal impression of high birth and deficient mental development. His large eyes were green and limpid, with light long lashes; his hair was pale red and very fine, but its stiff curl gave evidence of fierce strength somewhere, a strength wanting in his slight frame, narrow shoulders, and waist like a pinched-up girl's. His hands delicately white, were spoiled by the rat-like pinkness which crept to the ends of the fingers and tinged the pointed nails, also, though evidently well cared

for, the palms showed a number of pale freckles. His dress was a tight jacket, a waistcoat of pale blue velvet, a satin handkerchief of the same colour fastened with a ruby pin, shirt studs of turquoise, a cambric front over a blush of pink, a watch chain loaded with seals and charms, and a crimson flower in the button hole. A careful hand had dressed him; in simpler costume his insignificance would not have been disguised.

He had occupied the fourth side of the table alone during dinner, but when the dessert appeared a servant placed beside him a chair, then took up a statuesque attitude behind the empty seat. The boy watched it curiously, left his fruit untouched awhile, and what little conversation had circulated, now ceased. At last the tapestry was undrawn, the door opened, and a little girl entered. Two ladies appeared behind her, but they merely bowed and withdrew, while she advanced with amusing stateliness, not to the vacant chair, but to the head of the table.

"You are late, Hilda," observed the bland gentleman, looking at her more blandly than ever, but not like a parent.

Her eyes had fallen on the boy, she answered while looking at him, "I could not help it; they said I should not wear any flowers, so I ran out into the park after I was dressed, and gathered these violets. The grass was wet, and it spoiled my frock, so I had to be dressed all over again. And Madame Martinet scolded me exceedingly, and—"

"Hush, hush!" he checked her, "we will not speak of such things now. That is Lord Thanet, Hilda. Go and speak to him and bid him welcome—he is a stranger yet, you know."

"That is not my fault, I wished to see him this morning but they would not allow me, they said he was tired with his journey. I hope you are less tired now, though you look so pale," she exclaimed, going up to him and holding out her hand, which the boy looked languidly down upon, as though it were beneath his dignity to clasp

the fingers of so young a child. But a glance, not from the bland gentleman, but from the person at the bottom of the table, seemed to stimulate him; he rose and bowed rather elegantly, raised the little hand to his lips. She gazed round her, smiling, but with princess-like self-possession.

She was a remarkable child, and resembled no person present. Her lucid eyes had an expression scrutinising and imperious; her features were fully formed and lovely, as was her smile; pride unrepressed and passionate, pouted her rosy lip. Her light-brown lustrous hair was very long, and her drooping though dimpled shoulder foretold a splendid symmetry. Her dress was white, with a sash of pink and gold; in her bosom she wore the violets she had lately gathered;—those simple ornaments obtained although forbidden, betraying, as well as every tone and gesture, a contempt for contradiction as peculiar as the sweetness of her smile.

She took the vacant chair, and continued to

regard the boy with a gaze from which curiosity had chased all shyness, then, finding he did not speak she began to talk herself, very artlessly, still in a strain which betokened constant intercourse with elders.

"Your name is Gutilyn," she said: "I like it better than Lord Thanet. May I call you so? I always called you Gutilyn, ever since I heard of you."

Then, without giving him time to answer; "I know all the stories about your ancestors. The one I like best is that about the knight on the white horse, who killed the monster while it was asleep. I know all the verses, and I can read it in the black letter. I like this one best—

"On white horse Innocence yclept,
With harness of a silken thread,
Over the lands and seas he leapt,
Till he beheld the marvel dead
Through gazing on him while he slept."

"Ancient mesmerism," observed the gentleman at the top, to the gentleman at the bottom of the table.

"A wonderful memory!" replied that person.
The child took no heed of either; she ran on
in a soft but excited voice.

"His name was Gutilyn. He wore silver
armour. I wonder what the monster was like.
Do you think it was a griffin, or a dragon, or a
mermaid? I like the Saxons better than the
Normans. Do you like to be a Saxon? Do you
like to be called Gutilyn?"

The boy was agape with amaze; but he
covered his yawn with his hand, and replied:
"There is not much in names, after all."

"Oh! don't you think so? I am so particular,
even about the names of my dolls."

He seemed casting about for a more fortunate
answer.

"Mr. Smythe said you liked dolls. It is a
young lady's taste. But you are too old for
dolls. Are you not getting sick of them?"

"Oh no; oh no; I love them! Madame
Martinet says I am not to play with them after
I am ten; that will be in five months. Then I

shall have a white pony, and a little carriage drawn by eight goats, and a pair of Persian doves, and a mite of a dog, to lie in my hand. My name is Hilda—do you like my name?"

"It is a beautiful name."

"I am glad you like it. I am called after one of my ancestors, like you. She is called the white nun, because she was going to marry a knight, and as they stood before the altar the king sent for him to go to the crusades. And they dragged him away, and he was killed in the wars, and then she became a nun, but she always wore white because she was a bride. And she had her fine pearls made into a rosary. She gave all the rest of her jewels to the church, but she left the rosary to her family. And now it is mine—and it is worth millions!"

"Worth millions," interrupted the boy, with the first gleam of interest he had betrayed. "It cannot be worth millions."

"I mean no one knows how much it is worth—that is the same thing. I have many other

jewels, of course!" added the little creature, haughtily.

"I should like to see them," he observed, with still more interest.

"You shall, you shall! Sir Mortimer, do you hear? Lord Thanet wishes to see my jewels, and I wish to show them to him. May I?"

"Certainly," replied the bland baronet, looking well pleased.

She took the boy's hand, drew him after her, the servants flung open the door, and they went out together.

CHAPTER II.

THEY passed along a corridor, on the one hand a real old castle wall pierced here and there, to a great hall roofed with stone, the ceiling rude, the walls covered with pictures, the collection of centuries. The childrens' feet fell hollow on the floor, which, though inlaid with modern mosaics, was arched over vast and gloomy vaults, past prisons, the cellars of the present. The staircase blent also styles antique and new, its oak balustrade worm eaten, its pillars richly gilt. The steps swept to a gallery, dark with disstained banners, and brilliant with jets of gas. There were doors all round, at one the little girl

paused, saying: "My governesses are in there, and I must ask them for the keys. Of course you do not wish to speak to them. Won't you sit in that old chair, and wait for me? King Edward III. sat there once."

Never averse to repose, he threw himself into it and stretched his legs. But as soon as she had disappeared, he made a grimace at the hardness of the seat, and got up; instantly falling into contemplation of the relics the gallery contained, still not with the eye of an amateur, rather that of an auctioneer.

In the room she had entered, the little girl again exhibited the imperiousness for which she was remarkable. Two ladies were sitting by the fire, the one dressed in perfect taste and quiet tints, the other fashionably and very gay. She addressed the latter first.

"I want the keys of the fire-proof room. Give them to me immediately, if you please, Mrs. Wimpole."

"Sir Mortimer does not like you to have the

keys, Lady Burthred. He fears you will lose them."

"Sir Mortimer sent me for them. I *am* to have them. You must not keep me waiting. But I can get them myself."

She pushed a chair to the wall, sprang upon it, opened a closet drawer and pulled out a leather bag, which, however, was so heavy that she let it fall upon the carpet.

"You cannot open the door either," observed the other lady, mildly in French. "You are too little and weak. If I were my lady I would say to Mrs. Wimpole, 'open it for me, if you please, and I will thank you.'"

"So I will. I beg your pardon, but I was in a hurry. You do not know who is waiting outside! Come, Mrs. Wimpole, come!"

She rejoined Lord Thanet whom she roused from a reverie of reckoning. Again they traversed the hall, plunged into another passage, and stopped before an iron door. The lady, who had followed them, unlocked it, and would

have followed them still, but Hilda took from her hands a bunch of smaller keys.

"You must not come in, we are to be alone. I will come and fetch you when we have finished to lock the door again."

"I must not leave the lamp with your ladyship, it is not safe."

"It will be safe with Lord Thanet, I suppose. You will hold it, will you not?"

He hated carrying anything, but he did not say so. He snatched the lamp with eagerness.

"I will do anything for you," he exclaimed. Then, with cold contempt most unlike the child's warm pride, he pushed the governess from the room, and shut the door in her face. Hilda did not see him do it, she was already busy at a cabinet.

It contained at the top a baron's coronet resting on its velvet cushion, but Gutilyn had already wearied of a similar bauble of his own, he pulled out the first drawer. It contained the rosary of pearls, the beautiful pale stones so yel-

low and the setting so tarnished by time, that only a connoisseur would have guessed their value.

"How old they look!" observed the Earl of Thanet, "they are not likely to be of much use. Why don't you sell them?"

"Sell them!" she exclaimed. "Sell my family jewels? Why I would not if I were quite poor, and I am very rich."

"How good of you," said he, stroking her soft hair as though he were handling thistledown. "Look up at me! I wish to see your beautiful eyes." She raised them innocently—they were indeed beautiful. "How lovely you are—you are an angel."

"I would rather be a princess—a queen!"

"You will be some day, I am sure. You are so rich and so beautiful."

"You are very handsome too—I like your dress. You are a Saxon, you are so fair. Shall you be a soldier some day, and will you fight?"

"I will fight for you."

"But they don't wear armour now. If I were a knight I would wear armour. Will you wear it, because I admire it?"

"I will do anything to please you; but I am very unhappy, Hilda—will you pity me, and love me?"

"Unhappy? Ah, your papa is dead—did you love him very much? I only remember my papa a little; he kissed me in bed, and then he died. I did not see him when he was dead, but I wished to—they would not let me."

"What horrors to wish! Oh, yes, my father is dead, but he was not like yours—he was so cruel to me."

He passed his arm round her neck and drew her to him—a grown woman alone could have thrilled with the cold of that caress. She nestled nearer, and stroked his cheek. He sighed heavily.

"Your father cruel to you? Poor, dear Gutilyn! Mine was so good. He left me all his things, and this dear old castle."

"Yes, and you will have whatever you wish for all your life. And everyone will worship you because you are so beautiful and rich. My father was cruel indeed—he never saw me after I was a baby, and I am so delicate and weak because they half starved me."

"Starved you?—wicked wretches! I should like to stamp upon them. That is why you are so pale, poor Gutilyn. But never mind now, you shall remain with me, will you not? And I will give you delicious things to eat, and you shall ride all day on my white pony, and you shall sleep in the state bed, and you shall be my brother, a foreign prince, and I will be an enchanted princess."

"But you have not heard the worst," added the boy, whimperingly, "he spent all my money and sold all my horses, and got into debt, so that they took all his places but one, and that is a horrid old hole, full of rats and vermin, with water dropping through the roof. It falls on my bed and makes me shiver, and—"

"Horrible! wicked! He was like King John, and you are very like Arthur. Let me give you some of my things. See this drawer full of rings. I will put one on each of your fingers. But I think you have very pretty jewels on."

"They are cheap things which my brother-in-law, Mr. Smythe, gave me. It was very good of him, for I had none I cannot take presents from you."

"Oh, why not?"

"I would not for the world—you are too generous, and I could not bear to deprive you of them."

"You are unkind, Gutilyn. I should like to give them to you—why will you not let me?"

"Hilda," he whispered, bringing his red lips to her ear, "some day you might give them to me, if you would. I could not bear to keep them now, without *yourself*."

"I do not understand. Tell me what you mean."

"If you will marry me," still whispering

between kisses poured chill as hoar-frost on her cheek, whose baby-lilies knew not yet the rose, “if you will marry me when you grow up, I can take your things. And dearest, beautiful one, I am of higher rank than you are, although you are rich. I am one of the oldest earls in England, and you shall be my countess! You will not refuse me—no, I am certain you will not.”

“But Gutilyn, I am not old enough, though I do like you very much.”

“I do not mean *now*—I mean some day. Oh, Hilda, do not refuse me, I shall break my heart. I came on purpose to ask you, because I had heard you were so lovely. I am much older than you are, and have seen many ladies. I never saw one so fair!”

Her small, noble throat arched, her golden hair looked like a crown upon her brow, so regal was the expression of her infant vanity.

“I am glad you came, Gutilyn. I shall never like anyone else so well. I am *very* glad you are my cousin.”

She had never seen another boy or youth !

“ Then Hilda, listen to me. I shall put this ring on your finger, and you will wear it to show you are my betrothed. That is what the old Saxons did to the ladies they were going to marry before they went to the wars.”

“ And are you going to the wars ?” she clapped her little hands.

“ I am going abroad, and shall pass through many dangers. Now see this little ring; it is the *only* one I have. You see my motto upon it. It is very old and very valuable.”

It was very old, and might have been valuable in its day, but the yellow gold was worn sharp as a knife at the edges of the rim. It was a flat narrow band, without a gem—a perfect circle. Hilda put it on, but it was too large, even for her thumb.

“ I *will* wear it though,” she said, and dangled it gleefully from her middle finger. Then, “ Oh, Gutilyn! what shall I give you for it ?” she asked. “ I must give you something.”

" You shall give me these violets." He put out his lean white fingers, and took them from her bosom.

" But they will die so soon."

" I will keep them when they are dead; I will dry them and put them into the best book I have."

" What book?"

" My Bible; the one my sister gave me, and which I read every day!"

" Dear Gutilyn, how very good you are!"

CHAPTER III.

EVERY drawer of every cabinet had been opened, every case examined; there remained untouched only records on parchment, which neither Hilda nor her companion cared to open. She was anxious to take him everywhere, and they had explored as far as the portrait gallery, when they mutually agreed to waltz. Hilda, who had never had a young partner before, and who was weary of standing still as only children tire, had asked Gutilyn to dance with her, and though he abhorred the trouble it was needful to take, he took it.

The portrait gallery was in the oldest part of

the castle, and it had a staircase at the end leading downwards to the chapel, which in point of position resembled a sumptuous cellar; this staircase had no door either at the top or bottom, only a curtain of arras, to which Hilda was so used that she forgot to warn her companion there was no other barrier between them and the dark steep steps.

“Stop, stop!” she suddenly exclaimed, for she was unused to any but the formal dancing at a lesson, and had turned so giddy that she lost her footing. Still Gutilyn, in his excitement of conceit, whirled her round and round; but giddier even than herself.

“Stop, stop!” again cried Hilda; “the staircase, the staircase!” For the pattern of the arras swam in rings close before her eyes; but Gutilyn, who knew not of the staircase, whirled on in stupid wonder. Another moment, and with a scream—not from her, but him—they slipped down stairs together.

Hilda, whose blood had not one craven drop, pushed back Gutilyn, for she fell slightly first; he, who had not one monad of bravery in his material frame, took advantage of her spirit, let her go altogether, and caught at the baluster half way down. She fell to the bottom in the dark, for the gallery was but dimly lighted, and the tapestry had closed again above them. The ring, shaken from her small finger, had fallen first upon the stone flooring; and as she fell upon her side, with her hand under her, its circle was crushed, with its knife-like sharpness, into her flesh—not the palm, which would have signified less—but the back of that little hand, producing torture, which would have wrung from almost any child a cry. She did not cry; she only bit her lip, and saw before her straining eyes bright scarlet flashes.

“How stupid!” meantime muttered Gutilyn, who was not hurt at all, but still giddy, and rendered peevish by his exertion; but he seemed

to remember himself, for soon he cried, still crossly: "Are you hurt? Oh, Hilda! Are you hurt?"

"No:" answered Hilda, "not much; I fell on the mat, and it's soft, and saved my head. But I think I've sprained my hand; I sprained my ankle once."

"Sprained, sprained!" exclaimed the gallant loverling, sliding very carefully down the remaining stairs. "My darling, darling Hilda, you are hurt!"

The mere semblance of tenderness could draw tears to the eyes of this child, though pain could not bid her shed them. She wept very softly, and even then, seeming to disdain herself for doing so, as she would not let him kiss her, pressed past him, and ran up the stairs, crept through the arras, and held it up for him to enter the gallery, her cheeks still wet, but her lips smiling; she held the wounded hand behind her.

"Dearest Hilda, are you hurt?—but don't

show it to me," he was going to say, "if it bleeds," for he could not bear the sight of blood—but he added instead, "because I cannot bear to see what makes you suffer."

"I do not suffer," said the child, tearing off her sash as she spoke.

"Oh, what are you going to do?"

"To bind it up. They bound up my ankle with ribbon so this must be quite right. Do not look at me."

She turned her back to him and wound the silken swathe about her hand.

"I have saved my ring," she added gleefully. "I was afraid it might be broken. Did you lose the violets?"

"No—they are safe *here*," pointing to his breast.

It was ten o'clock that night, and Gutilyn, Earl of Thanet, was stretched on an easy sofa in a dressing-room of the castle, quite a man now and looking weary of the world, though he was indulging in what most gentlemen of sixteen

consider a luxury—a cigar. He wore a dressing gown of adult style, and slippers half off his feet. To him had entered Mr. Smythe, the gentleman before mentioned as placed at the bottom of the dining table. “Come in pray,” exclaimed Gutilyn, “I’m bored to death with playing the baby. Pray come in and talk.”

“But, my dear fellow, I hope to hear something satisfactory. As to playing the baby, what else could you do *to* a baby. Be sensible now, and in a year or two you’ll see—”

“I shall see what I abhor already—the frightfullest little simpleton. How dared they say she is handsome! I shall never carry it through.”

“She is not handsome after your present taste, but believe a grown man she will suit your future with a thousand charms. In the first place she has a divine skin; but you forget the motive—nay, the necessity—that is not beauty. As to carrying it through, I see nothing to carry through. You made yourself agreeable to-night, and we go away to-morrow. Then

half a dozen years of fatness--then one week's good behaviour—I would that such a fate were mine. I would have given eternity for it at your age."

"Elenora would thank you. However, she cares very little provided she has plenty of money—that's where Nell's like me. Do you really think the little imp will turn out presentable?—she has no figure—after Pauline, and the Howards, and Bab Molyneux."

"No figure! I should hope not at her age, or she'd be a hag at twenty. Precocious as you are, you would not like a woman after your own pattern. But, Gute, we must be serious. Pray mind your behaviour before Sir Mortimer at breakfast to-morrow—burke him till the very last minute—she's safe, he never can be safe enough."

"I don't care if I wait till she's eighteen—I don't care if I wait till she's eighty. I hate her—I detest milky-faced women. I don't see my way at all."

"*You must,*" exclaimed the other with determination. "What is the use of your discussing the matter, it was agreed to long ago. I candidly tell you that if you fail to conform to my arrangements, I shall not fulfil mine. With my three girls rising, and Frank and Watty, I have done more than I ought to have done already, in not only sending you to Eton, but paying for you there which I need not have done. And I expect, that should I furnish you out further, you will refund me by and bye. If it were not that Sir Mortimer is a blockhead and turnip-fancier, you know very well you would not be here, for otherwise he would suspect your resources."

"Your turn-out helped me there—I wish it were mine."

"It is yours as long as you need it—you know on what conditions. And as there's no knowing whom you may fancy abroad, whatever you like to indulge in I shall be happy to meet, provided you keep to terms."

"I must have my swing—it is my due, and have it I will, not only now but *then*."

"For that you must have money. She received you so graciously that you will be able to manage anything, and she will be one of those soft souls that worship tyrants. A word to the wise—you must not play the tyrant now."

"She's soft enough. She'd have emptied her chests out over me—worthless trash, but still a good sign."

"Excellent; but you accepted nothing I hope."

"Not I," winking. "I got rid of a ring though."

"And by this time she has opened the box of presents."

"Faugh!—a girl of her size playing with dolls!"

"A better sign than the other, for if she has children they will keep her at home, and free you altogether. I wish my girls nursed dolls; but they only make jockeys of them for their rocking horse."

Meantime, in another dressing room, lay Sir Mortimer Selden on *his* sofa, waiting for the fomentations this man had gone to prepare. Hilda was at his side, standing on tip-toe with exultation, holding in her arms a doll. It had adult features, real hair, and was dressed as the costliest bride. It was half as tall as the child herself.

"What a beauty--what a love it is! and how kind of him to give it me. Is it not the most exquisite dress, and its veil so graceful, and those tiny pearls are real, and a real point d'Alençon veil. Oh I never saw anything so lovely in *all* my life!"

"That has not been very long, my pet. Yes, it is very pretty."

"Dear Sir Mortimer, do examine its gloves, and its white kid boots, and this wee, wee ring on its finger. When I found the doll, I left all the other things on the table and ran to shew it to you. I wondered why it wore so long a veil, till Madame Martinet said it was a bride,

and that I shall be dressed so when I am married." Then creeping close to his ear she whispered, "Do you know that Gutilyn wishes me to marry him, and I think I will."

"Plenty of time for that, my darling. But your new friend is an elegant boy."

"And so generous. He would not take any of my things, and has given me a great many. Besides the doll, there are a Swiss cottage, and a little theatre, and a portrait of himself, so pretty, and best of all, he gave me a ring."

Sir Mortimer was very sleepy, but this roused him: he turned to look for the ring on her finger. "Why what is the matter with your hand, my poppet, that it is tied up with red ribbon?"

"I'll tell you, but you must not tell Gutilyn because he would grieve. I fell downstairs—it was all my fault—and the ring fell off, and I cut my hand against it. It does not bleed, and hurts me very little."

"Let me see it, child." Sir Mortimer turned

pale—he was neither a soldier nor a surgeon, but a soft-headed and softer-hearted old bachelor, sinking softly into the grave as into a feather bed.

The little one bared the back of her hand. It certainly had not bled, the pressure had been too tight, but it was a dull purple circle throbbing like a bite. Care was lavished upon it, warm water and sweet salve, but the next morning Hilda appeared at breakfast in long linen gloves, for she did not choose Gutilyn to see how deep and angry the red mark looked. Perhaps some forgotten poison, distilled centuries before, and whose death-potency had long exhaled away, had left a taint within the metal it had once impregnated. At all events Hilda suffered sorely from the wound, and never lost its scar.

CHAPTER IV.

THE position of these two children—rather of this experienced youth and inexperienced maiden—must already be partially obvious. Both noble, both orphans, and both under guardianship, they had been brought together for the first time that day, to ensure their future permanent connection by marriage. They were also cousins. Thus far their introduction was an affair often precedented, and of a fashionable character; further invested in this instance with peculiar and dangerous conditions.

Gutilyn Arthur Alured Wulph Athelstane, Earl of Thanet, was the successor and only son

of a peer, whose ancestors had exhausted, ages before his apparition, whatever chivalric attributes their founder might have possessed. His immediate predecessors had given token neither of sense nor virtue, yet had professed the proprieties of their rank, and perhaps owned a spark of self consciousness as to their duty, for they lived peaceably, fared sparingly, and kept up a certain dignity, though taking no part in war or statecraft. But constant intermarriages—that bane of an unimaginative race—had fused together all its weakness with the dregs of its deteriorated pride, in the father of the youth we have described. Without brain enough to be wrought upon by culture, or heart enough to realise his own deficiency, he was saved from being a fool only because he was a knave, still like a knave who is also a fool, very easily overreached. He was caught when young by a widow older than himself—he had better have married a cousin. But his race was trembling on the edge of extinction, of his own blood he

had only one distant relation—Hilda's father, at that time unmarried. The widow who captured rather than captivated the father of Gutilyn was handsome after a brazen type; black eyed, auburn haired, of dauntless impudence, that passed for dashing manners. She had nothing but an annuity to live on, yet seemed very rich, and she had one daughter, whom having ignored in her cradle she launched on the sea of society, directly she found she had survived her infancy—to get married or to sink. Lord Thanet met her and was wooed and won by her, at Brighton, where he had a few houses that would not let, but in one of which he lived when he was not in Town. He was not high mannered, and very easily caught, for he was sick of society, sick of solitude, sick of a naturally feeble frame overpowered by excess, sick of pleasures, which swamped rather than sweetened his existence; above all, sick of his miserably attenuated resources, his noble pauperism whose merits the Crown failed to recognise, of his mortgaged estates and meagre

style; his only castle in Kent, a ruin the rats abhorred, though it gave to the heir of his house the title of Viscount Sarre, and was therefore not to be despised by man.

A year after his marriage Gutilyn was born, and was from his cradle the companion of his half-sister Elenora. This young lady did credit to her training; she flirted at fifteen with grown men, stared young gentlemen out of countenance, gossiped with the butler, and romped with the footmen. When a mere child she followed the hounds, washed her own dogs, and groomed her own pony. But she was not so bad as her mother, and the ever attractive quality of good temper gleamed through her great white teeth and suffused her florid countenance. When seventeen she attracted thereby the attention of Mr. Walter Smythe, a young man whose father had been so successful an ironmonger as to be able to leave his son a millionaire. Elenora's mamma made her marry him directly; she very willing, though scarcely competent to form an opinion as to her

own feelings, they having been repressed through her over physical cultivation. Mr. Smith instantly changed the spelling of his name at great expense; and to do his wife justice, she would as soon have remained Smith of honest origin, as become Smythe on false pretences.

Gutilyn was three years old when his mother, Lady Thanet, driving herself in a light phaeton, with a high-actioned charger, was thrown out, and so severely injured in the head that she died of erysipelas. And Gutilyn was not far short of the mark when he said he had been nearly starved. For with an army of servants ever changing its members because they received no wages, and with a special guard of nurses who only stayed because plebeian visitors were accustomed to fee them munificently, the child was left to himself; none made it their business to attend to him; he lay for hours in his cot, sucking his thumb for hunger, and when just out of babyhood was drugged with saccharine trash to keep him quiet. But he grew apace, as ill weeds

do, though he could not be said to flourish, till his father died also, of hereditary gout. Gutilyn was then seven years old.

Walter Smythe came to the rescue—he was ashamed of the low estate of the house on which his own position depended. He took the weakling to his home, his pecuniary accommodations to the father, having secured him the right of guardian. But it was a pitiful affair when wound up, and it only remained to renew the prosperity of the race by marriage. Gutilyn was carefully educated, that is he had a tutor who was also a clergyman, he was sent to Eton, and was taught what others learned; had more been done it would be difficult to predicate with what better result, for his moral nature was worthless. Had he received only the enfeebled impression of his father's feeble nature, there would have been a chance of his being a harmless member of society, but he inherited with his father's pale eye, his mother's brazen glance, with the paternal imbecility, the maternal heart of stone, greed for

gain with instincts of the miser. He had her shrewd vulgarity, woven into a constitution so morbid that he could not have survived his infancy, except through such engraftiture of his own upon the stranger stock.

Hilda, Baroness Burthred, was as we have said, his cousin, though removed by several degrees, and though it was remotely possible he might become her heir presumptive. Her father's house was an ennobled branch of that of the Earl of Thanet, but much later exalted to the peerage for deeds of renown yet remembered, nor was it like his, the dilapidated monument to its own decay. However, the father of Hilda, also the child of near relatives, suffered from delicacy of constitution, but his spirit was strong and his talents were very remarkable. He was early called to office, and entered upon it with a sanguine sense of high responsibility. His refined moral conscience pained him in the restricted sphere of affairs he could not control, and which he found he could not sincerely serve.

Such stress impaired his physical health, and he retired at five-and-thirty, having actually at that time never thought of marriage, and under the full impression that his cousin—the son of his mother's only brother—would be his heir.

A consumptive tendency soon drove him abroad, and he took with him one confidential servant, and a single friend—an amiable man much older than himself, who had saved him when a youth from drowning, and had nursed him during an infectious disease which attacked him at maturity. He never forgot the double benefit, and perhaps could not over-rate, though it is possible he over-rewarded it.

English society—the circle open to him—had disgusted him, and it was a singular dislike for the monotony of character and sickliness of habit he had been used to criticise in women of fashion, that prevented his dreaming of marriage. He actually dreaded to perpetuate his race over whose physical fragility he mourned, and whose genius for action lay abeyant—perhaps for want

of opportunity to arouse itself. At all events he renewed his youth on going abroad in this one respect—he studied women carefully, but somewhat misanthropically, only in the lower orders. The peasantry of France too chirping and coquettish, those of Italy too sensual and superstitious for his taste; his design languished, and without any, he went on to Spain. But, after two years further wandering, he returned to England, bringing with him a foreign wife.

She was a charming woman of Castilian blood, though not of a noble house or wealthy family. In fact Lord Burthred met her at a mountain inn, kept by her own father, who had, however, guarded his only child with reserve and prudence, unusual in his class. She was sitting at a window concealed, as she believed, by its twining leaves and blossoms, when Lord Burthred first beheld her; and he first heard her voice in singing to her guitar, for her tones, though quite uncultured, brought travellers out of their way to hear them. He married her from passion, and

without mistrust, but mindful of English prejudices which might afflict her, he took her with him first to those cities of Europe which present the choicest opportunities of culture; he trained her voice, her hand, her eye—her heart required no teaching, and her beauty no studied grace. Then he brought her hither to adorn his home, fitted to be his companion as she had ever been his charmer. He loved her sincerely, but she adored him with an enthusiasm he was incapable of suspecting; he cared for her tenderly, she yearned to endure all dangers for his sake. Her life before she knew him was all pleasure, it became afterwards all bliss—such lives are never long. Besides, the raw climate so little suited her that she could only take the air on still summer noons—he guarded her from cold like an exotic plant, but from cold only, there seemed in her life of luxury no other chance to dread.

When her daughter, born the first winter she passed in England, was a few months old, she went to visit a tenant of her husband's, whose

babe was ill. She held the infant in her arms, caressed it, and returned home that she might send her own doctor to it—the Castle being so far from any town of note, that a medical adviser was a member of the household. The child had sickened for scarlet fever, and a month afterwards she too lay ill. The disease consumed her southern frame like fire; all remedies seemed to inflame its malignance, and when it spent itself, the last spark of life quivered among the ashes of mortality. The sacrifice she had longed to make for her husband, she made for her child, whom she refused to see from the hour of her illness till the moment of her death.

Her husband's grief was of too pure a character to permit him to think of a second marriage, though not so dark as to cloud his hopes of future reunion, nor so strong as to crush his interest in his child; still, life had lost its passion, and love longed after death, for on a second attack of the same consumptive symptoms, which had sent him

abroad, recurring, he refused to leave his home, and died there under forty years of age.

His whole time and thought had been employed to secure the happiness of his daughter, the sole heiress of his rights. There was but the friend with whom he had travelled in whom he chose to confide, as the guardian of his child, and trustee for her of the large property he owned besides his estates, and which was admirably distributed and invested. He knew not that his friend, who resembled him somewhat in disposition, was greatly his inferior in natural abilities, for Sir Mortimer Selden was one of those persons, whose adaptive breeding reflects the intelligence of others.

His power over his ward, however, was not absolute; for her will exercised as strong an influence over him, as even when an infant she had done over her father. She was a being of touching promise; her beauty, too, marked in the cradle, refined and ripened every year. With faculties of the highest order, thoughtful, yet

inventive, she required the highest cultivation of the mind, much more the nurture of the charities, the direction of the spirit's struggles. Generous in her impulses, and incapable of deceit, she was wayward, though scarcely selfish, proud, but never vain. Inheriting from her mother—child of the people—a certain vigour, luxury was not necessary to her full development, but she delighted and dwelt in it till it became needful to her life. Whatever warmth was in her blood never chased the pale loveliness from her cheek; the golden hair of the north was hers, its soft blue twilight in her eyes. With her bright mind and noble nature she was easy to teach, but not to train. It was impossible to find fault with her, for she was never naughty; always well and always happy, she was never punished, but constantly rewarded as for merit, for what was merely the result of good temper and active memory. Her imagination reveled in a child's paradise—a nursery of enchantment, her brain teeming with traditions of

her family, and of other families ancient as her own; it was natural she should cling to her home—that antique castle, like a honeysuckle embracing its old grey stone. Its hall of portraits—themselves a poetic history, its armoury, dim with the ghosts of heroes, its hoar, yet verdant park, its broad blue river, the sweet country round, lapsing into a distance no smoke defiled; such were the only pictures of earth she knew. And for her pictures of heaven the chapel of her house sufficed—a shrine fretted, carven, velvet-muffled, rich with monuments, splendid with escutcheons; its saint, the marble apotheosis of her mother; its light, the glory of gem-tinted windows; its teaching, repetitions in the midst of which she slept and dreamed—not of heaven—but the kingdoms of this world and their glory.

And as for poverty—which imparts such wisdom to the rich—the child only knew it as a fresh picture in her picturesque existence. Fair white cottages wreathed with roses, blooming

flower-patches, yellow beehives, or red-lipped children in doll-like dresses, tier above tier in a sunny room, all rising as she entered to shout her name, their patroness, to sing songs in her praise, their queen. Or strewing flowers at her feet, on birthday festivals, while she poured gifts on them from her generous little hand out of the abundance of her loving heart.

Thus with every faculty expanded by enjoyment, faith only fed by pleasure, she reached the age when the future becomes to the maiden what the present is to the child.

CHAPTER V.

A DRAWING-ROOM was just over. Amidst the mothers yet beautiful and their beautiful daughters, one lady had been specially observed both for the resplendent loveliness of her charge, and the sobriety of her own attire. She wore grey silk for train and dress, only feathers in her head, and but a large diamond cross for ornament. Yet, floating by like a moth in a swarm of butterflies, she lacked no state, she was high mannered and calm, and exclusive even among the exclusive, for she spoke to no one, smiled on no one, and only nodded distantly to a few

persons whom she passed. The loveliness of the girl beside her was not only brilliant but most peculiar, as though exceedingly fair she had not English features. The long haughty nose and tiny Moorish mouth charmed strangely by their contrast with the grey effulgent eyes, long sunny lashes, and shining hair. Her dress was rich and simple, purple convolvulus crept over its clouds of lace, and amethysts glistened like dewy violets amidst the natural golden wreaths that twined her head. Her bright glance blent gentleness with great reserve, the expression of her lips, benevolence with disdain.

One slight incident had marked her presentation. As she stretched her hand to receive the Royal palm, the Queen's eye ever vigilant although so kindly, had fallen for an instant upon a singular white scar which defaced the beauty of that hand. And the young lady otherwise self-composed, had flushed beneath the momentary scrutiny. But no one knew it except the Sovereign and that fair subject of hers

—not even the lady who presented her to the Queen.

The flush yet wavered on her cheek when she reached the open air. At her carriage door, which was opened as she approached with her protectress, stood two gentlemen. The chaperone drew herself up to a yet more stately height, but her fair charge started slightly, turned pale as with the repression of some sudden memory, and held out her hand to one of them, who from his appearance seemed the least likely of the twain to belong to her own circle. He grasped it.

“Excuse my intrusion,” he exclaimed. “I am not here for myself. May I have the honour, Lady Burthred, of recalling to your remembrance the Earl of Thanet, who fears—though I have endeavoured to reassure him—that you have quite forgotten him.”

“I never have. I should have known him”—she tendered him her hand, smiling sweetly

with dropped eyelids. "Lady Courtoun, you have heard us speak of our friend Lord Thanet."

"I have, but his lordship will excuse me for saying I cannot allow you to stand here. Get into the carriage, and these gentlemen will perhaps accompany us, if under our present circumstances they can find room."

Gutilyn placed Hilda in her seat.

"I will follow in my own carriage," said he, "which I left two hours ago, that I might watch for your first appearance, where you could not see me. Was it impertinent? Will you forgive me?" he added in the softest whisper.

"I shall be happy to see you," observed Lady Courtoun, before Hilda could reply; "let her go now, she is fatigued. Drive home."

But when they reached her house, the tall slight figure of the young nobleman appeared on the steps; he had driven faster than they.

"You must come and see Sir Mortimer—poor Sir Mortimer! he is quite an invalid now; he has

talked of your return a great deal, Mr. Smythe," said Hilda, as they entered the hall.

"Of *his* return—he only came to fetch me. Did not Sir Mortimer speak once of *me*?" inquired Gutilyn in his soft voice.

"Many times."

"Then I shall go to him directly."

It was evening, and Hilda was alone in the drawing-room. But lest it should seem strange that Lady Courtoun should have seen Gutilyn for the first time that day, let it be explained that she was a devout Romanist, and dwelt in cloistral calm, either at her castle in Ireland or her house in town. She had lost her only daughter at the threshold of introduction twenty years before, and had then retired from the world into the shadow of her ancient family's faith, never to return to society on her own account. Being by marriage Lady Burthred's cousin, and the wife of her presumptive heir, she had agreed to present her, and was in London for the purpose this season, it being her habit to avoid the great city

when its aristocratic quarter was full. The difference between her religious profession and that of Lady Burthred's guardian, had prevented the orthodox Sir Mortimer from consulting her about Hilda's education, and they had never met before since Lady Burthred was an infant.

Lady Courtoun had left Hilda in the drawing-room alone, because she thought the maiden would soon go to Sir Mortimer's room, as was her custom in the evening, either to read him the newspapers he liked to hear, though he loved not to mingle in the strife that dramatised their teeming columns, or to sing to her guitar the simple songs he liked better, or to talk to him in her still child-like fashion, which he liked best of all. But long after Lady Courtoun was closed within her oratory this night, Hilda sat on a low chair beside the fire in the drawing-room, quiet as a statue, except for the flashing of the necklace, which heaved with each gentle breath. At last that gentle breath was echoed near her by a sigh as gentle. She turned, and saw,

though she started not this time, that Lord Thanet was standing behind her chair. Had she expected him? Perhaps so, she smiled so sweetly.

"Will you not be seated?" she said with timid dignity.

He threw himself noiselessly on the edge of the cushion in which her feet were buried. Then he gazed into her face for some moments without speaking, with an expression that admirably conveyed the medium between respect and rapture.

Gutilyn had gained much by travel. Who has not met an oaf of his acquaintance transformed into a chivalrous automaton after a few years residence upon the Continent—we mean in its best circles? Who has not been astounded at hearing the dumb speak, the stammering enriched with eloquence; at discovering the halt trained to social gest and grace, the very blind made to see through the anointing of the eyes with foreign experience? We have seen such things. But Gutilyn was of a noble though degenerated race, its symmetry pervaded his tall, meagre frame with

elegance, and without the slightest art, his imitative faculty was equal to an ape's. He had left no trick unlearned by which self can be advanced or adorned; cold as ice, he reflected all impressions, absorbing none; clever as the heartless often are, he veiled his blank soul with mystifying softness. But he never fawned, he was too high-bred, his manner escaped the edge of insinuation, although so soft; in fact he already knew so perfectly one class of women, that his experience gave him temporary power over a woman whose class he knew not. The languor of his boyhood had vanished amidst vicious excitement—he was polished from head to foot by the arbitration at once refined and rigid, of Parisian style. The outside of the sepulchre was so beautifully carved and whitened that it would have required the wisdom of the sage in years, or the sorrowful in youth, to pronounce the spirit unworthy of its shrine.

“Lady Burthred!” he began after his survey, still, however, with his large limpid eyes upon

her face. "I can scarcely recall you though, by that name. I have much to explain to you—will you permit it? Forgive me; but I should never have dared to address you as a woman, had I not known you as a child. Oh, Hilda, call me once by my name, as little Gutilyn, the innocent boy; innocent then, and in his love for you, I fondly trust, still innocent!"

She drew back, she covered her face with her hand to hide its flush; her heart bathed in the fancy that had flushed her cheek, fresh as an infant's dream.

Gutilyn also held before his face his hand, that he might collect his powers, might find words for ideas which existed not in his brain.

"Hilda, you must have ten thousand admirers—millions, as you said when you were a child!"

"Admirers—no, not one!" in a sweet yet haughty accent. "I wished not for any; I always lived at Champian since you went, and I was very happy there."

"And ever, ever shall be. You recollect me when I came to Champian? You were a child then, but I was not a child; I knew then what you were as well as now, and felt perhaps as deeply that upon no other in this world could my future happiness depend. I thought of this moment, when you would be a woman, and I might throw myself at your feet and tell you I had never forgotten you—never ceased to worship you; had waited wearily."

"You waited?"

"With impatience; with dejection. That was why I could not stay in England. I could never have parted from you, if here. And it was my duty to do so; I trust in my position always to preserve a sense of duty. But I always looked forwards. And I did not lose a moment; was I not there this morning to see you blaze upon the world?"

He expected she would reply, but she felt too much, was far too deeply moved by what she believed the fulfilment of her heart's romantic

prophecy. He was therefore driven to extremity. Very tender was that despair.

"There was a ring, a poor shabby little ring; I am ashamed to mention it."

"You gave it me!" she exclaimed with generous energy. "You begged me to keep it, and I did so, in case you might require it again. In itself it is a valuable relic."

"Ah! she gave me some violets. Here they are;" he drew from his bosom a small packet, pierced by a faint sweet perfume—he opened it. They were violets indeed—but not from the autumn woods of Champian Castle; they had come from Covent Garden Market, fresh not a week before. Then Hilda, with a proudly beating heart, drew forth a double locket from its hiding-place beneath her dress, and opening the lid revealed the old sharp ring, which had left its leprous-like sigil upon her lovely hand.

CHAPTER VI.

HILDA sat next morning in the drawing-room while Lady Courtoun received her few visitors, but was not introduced to any of them, as they all belonged to a smaller, graver sphere than that she was prepared to enter. She had not seen Lord Thanet since the night before, but she expected him now every moment, partly fearing, partly wishing for his arrival.

At length there entered a lady whom she noticed directly she heard her voice, being attracted by its tone, though she had not caught the name given by the servant. Lady Courtoun was talking to another of her friends, and nodded

familiarly to the newly arrived, who sat down at some little distance, very nearly opposite Lady Burthred.

She was a small woman, past girlhood, extremely pale, with eyes of the darkest hue, not warm and soft in their expression as such eyes often are, but cold and sad. Her features were delicately formed, but all touched with that same passionless pathos, as of one who had left the joys of life far behind her, but could not yet attain to the calm of faith which some have found on earth.

As she caught sight of Hilda's beautiful face a smile of strong admiration crossed her lips, but she checked it immediately and looked away. Hilda felt disappointed, she would have liked to speak to her. Soon the other visitor left, and then Lady Courtoun took the next seat, and shook hands over again.

"And now, my dear Pamela, let me hear how you are, and your little pet, and all *her* pets."

Hilda noticed a patronising twang in Lady

Courtoun's voice, which was not usual to her and seemed strange, as the person she addressed was though much younger, as austerely dignified as she.

"Amie is quite well I thank you, and all her favourites, except the pigeons, which have flown away. The little dog your ladyship sent for her, charms as much as the first day it came."

"I am pleased to hear it. You should have brought her."

"I came on business—to solicit a favour, as usual."

"Pray let me hear it."

"It seems a small thing, and yet it is very possible you will think me interfering. You have placed my gardener's little girl in your Catholic school, at least Dr. Doring did so I believe. It was kindly meant, but her father is very anxious. He is too much like a child himself to argue with, but of course he has a right to his own belief, and he besought me to restore her to him. I came to you first to re-

quest permission to remove her, and to place her in my school instead."

"Your gardener, my dear, who is he?"

"George Anderson; he has only just come to me. The child was staying with her aunt somewhere in this parish: the aunt is Irish though the father is Scotch—both strict I fancy."

"Well, well, you must do as you please of course. What do you wish me to do? Shall I write to Dr. Doring, and let you know when I hear from him."

"Excuse me, that is not straightforward enough. If you would give me a line for him, I could drive there with it."

"What—this morning?"

"Yes; I promised to take her back with me."

Lady Courtown went to the table, scrawled a few lines with the rapidity of one used to business correspondence, then sealed the note and rang the bell.

"Jameson, my messenger, shall take it, and bring back the child; it will save you driving

into Whitechapel, and give me the pleasure of seeing you for an hour. I have much to consult you on."

Just at this moment Lord Thanet sauntered in, looked slyly round, then seeing Hilda, hastened to her with an excellently painted smile. The lady whom Lady Courtoun was addressing had followed Gutilyn with her eyes from the instant he appeared, and keenly watched the greeting between Hilda and him. But Hilda thought no more of anything or any person except Gutilyn, till she found herself face to face with the pale lady at the luncheon table, Lord Thanet of course being seated at her own side and devotedly though most delicately attentive to her. Still, through his low winning accents, she heard now and then stronger and stranger words which indicated the topics of conversation chosen by Lady Courtoun and her guest—the state of the poor at large, of national education, of hospitals, foundations and sisterhoods. Hilda heard without understanding, she was only puzzled. At

length, Gutilyn in extremity of *ennui*, seeing she had finished eating long ago, whispered to her to leave the room with him. She did so, as Lady Courtoun was saying, "And you have moved since I saw you, pray give me your new address."

"I have not left Spring Grove; it is only the Birches instead of the Hermitage."

Hilda heard the answer as she passed the speaker's chair. Why did she notice the address of a stranger, and repeat it to herself over and over again as she went upstairs? Yet she did so, as if through magnetic prescience, all unconscious of its impulse.

Deep also must have been the impression, for in the evening, though her heart was full of soft thoughts as a flower with dew, though Gutilyn had performed the task of proposing marriage to a lady with great taste and finish; even amidst her flush and stir of fancy, she recollected the stranger of the morning, who lived at the Birches, Spring Grove. Alone again with Lady Courtoun,

she asked: "What is the name of the lady who stayed to luncheon?"

"Miss Ward, Pamela Ward, an *old* young friend of mine."

"She does not look old; who is she?"

"The daughter of a literary man, who did what few do in these days, made a handsome fortune by his pen."

"What is she—I mean what kind of person?'

"What makes you ask me that, child?"

"I scarcely know; but she charms me, her countenance is so interesting. I wonder you did not introduce me to her as you are so intimate."

"Your friends cannot be mine. You belong to the world, and I hope will be a virtuous example to your own sex among the great: I have left the world, and my few acquaintances have done the same."

"But I do not wish to know your other friends, I do not like them; I like her. May I go with you to call upon her?"

Lady Courtoun looked somewhat annoyed, more mysterious; at last she spoke as if she had made up her mind suddenly.

"My love, as you are just entering life, and are soon to enter the world, I must tell you that she would not be a desirable companion—not even a desirable acquaintance for you. I believe her to be a changed character, and I feel a serious interest in her, and am happy to aid her with my counsel, but she was not always what she now appears. In early youth she left her home under very questionable circumstances, went abroad, and returned with a little girl whom every one suspected to be her own child. She never contradicted the report, so that it became certain, and the more so because she has lived in great retirement ever since. It is right you should know that such things happen, you must hear of them; it is also right you should avoid contact with such persons while you are so very young."

"Do you mean that she is *Miss Ward*, and

yet has a little child of her own?" asked Hilda in a low but vivacious voice.

"My love, I told you so," complained Lady Courtoun, annoyed that she would harp on the subject.

"Then I tell you I am certain it is not true. She could not do anything wrong. If she had done anything to be ashamed of, she would not look as she does. She only looks unhappy."

Lady Courtoun stared, but put her down still more decidedly. Hilda went to bed with a decision in her wayward heart, that as soon as she was married to Gutilyn she would make acquaintance with Miss Ward on her own account.

CHAPTER VII.

ON an autumn morning, four months after her appearance in London, Hilda, again at Champian Castle, sat in a room which did not look like the boudoir of a lady. It was, if we may use such a term, the boudoir of a gentleman; she herself had furnished it for her husband before their marriage.

Its walls were painted in panel, small scarlet coated huntsmen, green habited sportsmen, horses, hounds, and foxes; flying and fallen game, with borders of pheasants' plumes arranged in fans, and a gilt and tasseled horn at every corner. There was a writing table of inlaid woods, the inkstand, a little race-cup: there were couches of

stamped velvet, sheaves of canes and ridingwhips, the skins of lions and leopards fringed with gold, overspread the carpet; behind the door hung an ancient Spanish sword, and a pair of beautiful little pistols that looked like toys. Then there were little tables strewed with fancy snuffboxes, powder flasks, cigar cases; a group of bronze dogs on one side of the window, on the other three stags in marble; the mantleshelf was adorned by equestrian statuettes, and a clock in the middle formed the window of a tower on the back of a silver elephant.

Nothing could be prettier than the room, nothing more elegant than the table before which Hilda sat, with its breakfast service of gold and cups of turquoise-tinted china; everywhere, on plate and porcelain, the double coronet and the double cipher of the houses of Burthred and Thanet. And nothing could be lovelier than the lady, or more graceful than her dress, white muslin over a blush of silk, round the throat a fringe of lace closed with ruby studs, her hair

fastened by two golden arrows to a comb like a golden bow. And, above all, nothing could be sadder than her aspect. A change decided, as if wrought by illness, had swept her features, yet they were riper and more chiseled, nor was her figure shrunken. A shade, dark as the consciousness of a crime, rested upon her forehead, her dropped lids were swollen, though the lashes were dry upon her cheek. Still she was not calm, for her hands played passionately with the ornaments of her dress, and shook the bracelets on her wrists like fetters. And when suddenly she heard a door slam in the distance, and raised her eyes, their blue heaven was clouded with wrathful pride, and their glance more wayward than in her childish days.

The door had been slammed by Lord Thanet, who was also in a passion, but of another kind. His temper, always evil, no longer restrained itself. Instead of joining his wife in the room where she expected him, he stopped halfway in the gallery, and stood staring out of one of the

windows. In a moment another door opened, and Mr. Smythe peeped, then came forth, cautiously, wiping his mouth like one at breakfast.

"Are you alone?" drawled Gutilyn.

"I am in my dressing-room, but you won't join me, of course."

"If you won't let me I shan't breakfast at all; I shall go out."

"But Lady Thanet?"

"She may breakfast by herself if she is vulgar enough to come down so early."

"But I don't understand; you breakfasted with her yesterday."

"For the last time," muttered Gutilyn in a tone at once sulky and infuriate.

"Don't stand here then, for God's sake; she will hear."

"Let her hear, if she has not already heard enough."

He followed Smythe into his room, kicked the door behind him, threw himself on a sofa, with his feet higher than his head, and bored his

fingers into his eyes. Then sat up, dragged one dish after another to him, pushed each away, smelt at a cup of coffee without tasting it; at last lighted a cigar, threw it away half finished, and ground his brittle teeth.

Smythe, frightened at first from speaking, was now frightened into it.

"What's the matter, Gutilyn; has anything happened?"

"Happened! is there anything more *can* happen? Curse you," raising his tone, "how dared you tell me she was manageable?"

"Who, Lady Thanet? Excuse me, I said she was a lovely creature; all lovely creatures are manageable, under training. You have not had time."

"Confound all lovely creatures! I never knew what a bore it would be to *hate*, I thought it was only a bore to *love*."

"Neither to love nor to hate are grammar in good society. Nell tells me I am a dear good soul

because I am indifferent; I can give her credit for the same virtue."

"But, the devil, it must be mutual; and I can't be indifferent—I detest her!"

"You might at least conceal it; in fact, you must, as you are well aware. She is very generous for a woman; they usually exact so."

"Don't mention exactions till you know hers. Were she another woman I could crush it, as I dare not yet in her. She is a fury, for all her milky looks. I have told her any other woman in her position would be ashamed of such demonstrations. I have borne her ways for six weeks, her embraces, her fondlings, her sickening sensibilities; but I never bargained for her insolent tempers, nor found them out till now."

"What happened then? she seemed very loving yesterday at dinner, I'm sure she looked so."

"It was afterwards, when we were alone. She was clinging to me, and I rose rather suddenly, and as she had leaned her whole weight on me,

of course she fell; *I* did not throw her down, though she deserved it. She looked up in my face. ‘What do you mean, Gutilyn?’ she asked; ‘I was kissing you.’ ‘Kissing me,’ faugh!“

“But that was not enough to enrage a sensible woman—what followed?”

“I said soothingly, ‘Pooh, my dearest, I must go out.’ Then I added, with the greatest delicacy, for I hoped she was, as you say, sensible, ‘You know, love, the honeymoon is not perpetual.’ She tossed her head. ‘What do you mean by using such vulgar words to me? what of the honeymoon?’ Then, if she had flown on like Nell, a thorough-paced virago, I should have known what to do, but she burst out crying, and sat on a stool. And what do you think she finished up with? ‘I thought it would always be the honeymoon with us, Gutilyn; did you know I loved you, *I*?’”

“Too strong certainly. I doubt not it put you up. So she is *exigeante*,” he added musingly. “I did not expect that. I fancied her pliant,

ridiculously so. It shows one can never be at the end of them. What said you then?"

"I don't exactly remember; but I explained to her gently that she is a wife, and not in a position to encroach any longer. Nothing could be tenderer than the tone in which I added that it is underbred on a woman's part to take the initiative in matters of affection, that in her rank she belongs to society through me, and that soon her time would be fully occupied with what I trusted would put such childish affectation away from her, and all that sort of thing."

"What then?" for the hero hesitated.

"I tell you," he continued sulkily, "I don't recall everything that passed. But she flounced out of the room, and locked her door, and I never saw her till two o'clock. I was in bed and asleep, and I woke with a wet dab on my face. She had crept into my room like a cat, and was crying over me—disgusting!"

"But that was very pretty. I hope she begged your pardon."

“Nothing of the kind. She said she hoped, she believed, I had not meant what I said—she was sure I had not. I answered, ‘Meant what, my love? I never remember what I say nor mean much of it.’ Then up she fired again. ‘How dare you say you forget what you say to me, you will next forget I am your wife.’ ‘I wish I could,’ I said, for I was angry, thoroughly put out by being woke up. Then she pulled her hair over her face; and sobbed behind it like a low actress. And I hid my head under the clothes, it was time to let her see I was ashamed of her. Presently I looked out, and she had gone, crawled forth as she came in. And to crown all she has had the matchless impudence to order breakfast in *my* room, as usual, as if she did not deserve my displeasure.”

“You must allow me to say, Gute, that you are acting very imprudently just now. Suppose she tells Sir Mortimer.”

“He is dying as fast as possible, she told me

so yesterday, and sniveled as usual. He can do nothing."

"He might empower some person to exercise an influence over her if he thought her unhappy —some person who would damage *yours* in respect of the property she cannot hold until she comes of age. He has not done so now simply because the little fool has told him she adores you and that you are a genius. You should be grateful to her for that."

"She'll never tell him anything; she's too conceited to allow she made a mistake. Besides, she's too soft to worry him now he's near we won't say what."

"I must say I thought you more of a philosopher. Nell will greatly blame you, and you know what you think of her opinion. She thinks well of Lady Thanet, whom she saw at Court, though she agrees with me she is a perfect child. I wish you would keep matters smooth till Nell's visit; you have no idea how many she has broken in, she is excessively clever with girls

who have had their heads stuffed with sentimental humbug."

"Why didn't you bring Nell then? What a bore you are, never of the least use to me."

"My dear fellow, Nell is setting the finest possible example to an exacting bride, by staying among her friends while I am here. But to return to Sir Mortimer, till he's dead you *must* humour him. Not to speak of what he'll leave between you, your share of which you forfeit if you offend him."

"You don't believe he would fasten it up to her?"

"I do sincerely, if he is the least upset."

"No chance of that," said Gutilyn, viciously, "for when I suggested, 'I supposed she'd go and whine to Sir Mortimer, as you are such a baby,' she cried, 'I shall never tell anybody, nor cry before anybody, I am too ashamed of it.'"

"Well, if I were you, I would be friends again without making it up. Drop it easily, do not act beyond your usual manner; be calm, and she

will cool fast enough. Of all things, preserve strict politeness; pray go and wish her good morning."

"Shall I mention Nell's coming?"

"Certainly; if you are good enough to wish it; I will write for her to-day."

Lord Thanet entered the room where his wife still sat. She looked up and bowed, certainly not like a child. He approached her.

"Good morning, dearest."

"Good morning to you, Lord Thanet." He held out his hand, she touched it, dropped hers with great composure.

"My love, I am anxious to introduce my sister to you."

"Mrs. Watson Smythe?"

"Nell—you know Nell. I am much attached to her: she is an excellent and brilliant creature, delightful in a house. She will make you a cheerful companion, you will need companions during my absence, when I am obliged to go to town."

Hilda had left off playing with her ornaments, she sat looking at him with full calm eyes: his were downcast.

"Have you any objection?" added he.

"Have I any objection? of course not. When is she coming, and which rooms would you like for her?"

Gutilyn still looked down, disconcerted, yet triumphant. "Whichever you please, the lady must cater for the ladies. You know also that we shall have the castle full for Christmas; it should be before."

"You said we must, after the honeymoon. And we have been married six weeks, it is more than time."

"You know I have no wish to hurry you, and I must run to Town first. But I rather thought of Nell coming to help you, she has so much experience. She took such a fancy to you the day we were married. I hope you liked her too."

"I did not see her—I looked at no one in church; and we came here directly."

"And about your own friends—you know best whom you may like to meet, Nell. You must choose your own, I mine, for you are a child yet, my pretty wife."

"I have no friends. If I am a child I know no other children. They never brought anyone to play with me except you once. Whoever you wish to ask I will add to the list I made out yesterday."

He kissed her brow, she recoiled, but quietly. He went to the bell and rang it—ordered the horses.

"You will ride to-day? Hilda."

"I beg you to excuse me, I have a very bad cold."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. SMYTHE perhaps owed his ignorance to his plebeian origin, though we scarcely think so—at all events it was very dense. He had, as he said, considered Hilda to be a child up to the date of her marriage, and with great justice as her innocence was concerned; but there are children who know more than most grown persons. However, child as she was, she had always treated him exactly like a servant, but being excessively generous to her servants, even as an infant, he scarcely anticipated from her kindness to him that she would give his wife a cool reception.

Doting, indulgent Sir Mortimer, whose life

had hung for weeks on a thread, who had been carried into church in an easy chair that he might give Hilda away—on whose account indeed her marriage had been very quiet—this meek, weak being, occupied her time almost entirely after the scenes we have sketched. His eyes were dim, and his faculties shared that mist; he did not observe any change in her except that she was more daughterly and fond; and being a tenant of hers now, his shrubbery fence joined the wall of her furthest garden, so that she was accustomed to go, unattended by any servant, to his house. Perhaps Lord Thanet and Mr. Smythe would have considered her not only a child, but an idiot, if they had heard her whisper to Sir Mortimer, when he, peacefully dying, asked her if she had anything more to say to him. “Give my love to my father and mother, and tell them I hope soon to come to them.” He was too near his immortal hour to deem that charge a strange one, and his lips moved assent, maybe his soul fulfilled it.

The very day after his funeral came Mrs. Watson Smythe, alone of course, though she had an infant four months old in London. Hilda, who had been weeping bitterly, made haste to bathe her eyes, and descended the grand staircase to give her welcome. Gutilyn was in the hall, and Mr. Smythe, who had not seen his lady since the above named infant's christening. The husband and wife met coolly of course, merely shaking hands.

Nell was an extra-sized lady, a woman whose presence swept all consciousness away of any other woman while she was by; hilarious, ruddy, robust, followed by a maid who carried in a heap of cloaks three dogs, and a silver *chauffe-pieds*. Nell never wore wraps, nor had cold feet, and the only use she made of her dogs was to tread upon them accidentally, but she took up every fashion though she sometimes did not drop it soon enough. She was dressed in Stuart tartan, with a *basque* of scarlet velvet, a bonnet trimmed with

grapes, tight gloves, which her fat hands nearly burst at the seams. Eyes black as coal, very bright under the influence of the dozen glasses she could drink at dinner ; red lips, teeth white as pearls, but not real gems, for she had destroyed her own teeth when a child by eating incredible quantities of bad sweetmeats, which she preferred to good ones. She was not devoid of what is vulgarly called gumption, though quite guiltless of what is delicately termed tact.

Hilda courteously preceded her into a dressing-room. Nell who had gripped Lady Thanet's hand, so that the finger's cracked, felt rather uncomfortable with the slight regal-looking girl when alone with her. Hilda found this out in a few moments, and did not open her lips, only stood and gazed into the grate. Still Mrs. Smythe was tongue-tied, and bustled about, throwing her bonnet first on a chair, then sitting on it, then hanging her cap on the glass, which manœuvre recalled Lady Thanet to herself.

"You want your maid," she observed, and withdrew.

But Nell preferred undress manners, and before the maid could be got at in the distant region to which she had been conveyed, the mistress had invested herself with a robe of rose coloured gauze, covered with a pattern of golden cauliflowers, and had thrust her rough hair behind into a golden net spangled with garnets. Then she marched to her husband's dressing-room, to which she was guided by hearing him sneeze. Here again there was no nonsense, they did not embrace each other; he was looking at the back parting of his hair in the glass, and she sat on the scroll of the sofa.

"Well, I suppose you want to know what I think," she observed.

"Of course I do," he answered, "but you have not seen enough to be able to judge."

"I've seen enough to know this; she won't trouble him long. She's as changed as a chicken from an egg since she was married."

"She's fretting to-day after the old fellow, but she is very well in health. She rides almost as far as you do."

"Very likely. However, as long as she lives, her tastes will be domestic; she'll be one of the good doers, and that isn't a bad thing for Gute's wife to be. She's a little touched in the head, most of the old families are, of course, and Gutilyn only owed it to his mother that he isn't a noodle too."

"He does indeed. Well, if you are right, as you usually are, I hope she'll last three years, or it will be a terrible misfortune for us all."

"She may last longer; but it is of no use trying to blarney Gutilyn into her, he never will. She's rather too beautiful for him, and not pretty enough."

"You can say a sharp thing now and then, Nell."

It was well she could, for at dinner, Hilda, acting up to her childish pretensions, only spoke when spoken to. But Gutilyn was always

amused by his sister's chatter, which never rose above his own level; and when after her wine, Nell grew brilliant, he, stupified by the same process, actually seemed good-natured. During the evening he laid his hand on the back of a sofa, on which his wife was leaning; but she sat forward directly, and she never returned his smile.

The next morning they all rode. Nell could ride twice as far as Hilda notwithstanding her husband's assertion, and being glad to get out of an empty castle, she drew the party on thirty miles into the country. They refreshed at a farmhouse—all eating hunches of brown bread and cheese; for though puny, Gutilyn had an insatiable appetite, all except Lady Thanet, who only touched with her lips a cup of milk, scarcely whiter than they. And on their return to the castle, she professed herself much indisposed; she was actually utterly exhausted, and not sorry for the excuse to do so, she remained in her room a week. Nell, though coarse, was

not heartless like her brother, and she treated Hilda like a kind, but boisterous nurse, bouncing in at all hours, and making whirlwinds with her skirts, then patting the patient, and dealing resounding kisses on her passive cheeks. When Gutilyn paid her a visit, he knew neither what to do nor say, and was glad to get out again. At each of his appearances, Hilda made a point of saying : "I hope your sister will make herself at home."

When she left her room she found that Nell had done so; had acted regent on so magnificent a scale, as to preside at table, lecture the housekeeper, scold the footman, drive the women servants, for her social position was ever a weariness to Mrs. Watson Smythe, who would have made a firstrate maid of all work herself. Also she had remodeled the furniture, mingling modern and mediœval, turning the antique into the lumber rooms. Hilda did not know her own drawing-room, whose quaint splendour had been left unmarred by the upholsterer employed to

ornament the premises, for he had a correct taste. Hilda discerned the change, but was in a mood which, like twilight, tinges all objects alike. She glided into the drawing-room, passed Nell like the phantom of a queen, sank into a seat; she had no aim, not even in passing the time till dinner. Nell was rosy, agreeable, and strong; she looked at Hilda as I have seen a boy look at a butterfly he found fluttering in the dust. If the butterfly had been flying, he would have caught it, and spitted it upon a pin; but seeing it wounded, he relents, picks it up carefully, perhaps even carries it to the hedge-side, and hides it among the grass.

"Really," said Nell to herself, "she is as white as a ghost. I hope Gutilyn does not beat her; he used to pinch and slap me, I know, when we were children, but then I always gave it him back again." She then said aloud: "My dear Lady Thanet, you are so sweetly delicate, and so extremely young, that I hope you will excuse me

for what I have done, and let me take all the trouble off your hands till you are stronger."

"I thank you," replied Hilda; "I hate trouble."

Then she took up one of a heap of new books lying on the table, which attracted her by their gay coloured covers.

"I sent for all those," Nell observed, "Gutilyn wished to present them to you. How you have ever contrived to live without them in the country, I cannot think."

"They seem stories," said Lady Thanet.

"Stories! they are all the best novels, only better bound than they publish them in these days. One can't know anything about anything, without reading them."

This was one of those true things which ignorant persons sometimes say. Now Hilda had a passion for reading. Her nursery had been abundantly supplied with fairy lore and fancy story; she had absorbed all. A little older she

was steeped in the legends of all nations which only a superior child delights in. As she progressed she imbibed a love for history and read it in several languages, selected. It took the place of every tale which had not been a legend, and the legends seemed in their historic frames to become more real. Her education was conducted without a break by clever if commonplace masters; and in their absence her studies were superintended by an English governess who had never read Shakspeare, and a French one who held by no literature save that of France (also holding that French literature was improper for unmarried ladies to read); but that education was cut off, not finished, at seventeen. And she had read no romance. Soon was the trap Nell had baited empty, the mosaic table bare, for she had carried the books upstairs and they never came down again.

Her taste was virgin, her fancy fresh as the wood violet when she began to read, and went on reading all day and half the night, till the

hundred volumes were her own. An ordinary girl would have read herself stupid, she became the more intensely conscious. As though revealed by the electric light, the anatomy of feeling which should be concealed, that of living which seldom starts out of mystery, alike blazed upon her faculties. Totally unprepared, she plunged into Bulwer and Balzac, Dumas and Dickens, Goethe, Dudevant, a host besides, more dangerous to the inexperienced than they, because so far less passionate and forcible. Neither was there anything to correct or moderate the impression. Women had husbands whom they adored or hated, or loved men not their husbands. Then both made each other miserable, and revenged themselves in deed or in thought. Women did strange things, men knew strange secrets; philosophy lent divinity to crime, and all angels were not holy. Wondrous events transpired which made her marriage appear monotonous. Above all, persons who suffered had an admiring world to contemplate them, and their agonies were attuned

to harmonious words. Wild passions raged; and wicked beings ruled, but were subdued by love, and there was always the inevitable heaven upon earth at last. The innocent, if mistaken, clinging of her heart to Gutilyn she found nowhere pourtrayed, she therefore drew the inference that she had no duties because she owed no love. All the villains reminded her of him, she saw herself in every faultless heroine.

This mood lasted many days, then its cold brightness passed—colder was the darkness that followed. Again the extreme sensation faded, her mind recovered its equilibrium, but not her heart. There sprang within it a demand for actual life, her being became one vast enquiry; no longer Nature charmed her, and though she hated solitude, she hated still more the society of the persons she daily saw. She was in a transition state, which, more than any frame requires a guide, more than any fever a physician.

She became vigorous in calling upon her neighbours, in receiving them unweariedly cour-

teous. Nell exulted, Gutilyn was amazed; he could not but praise her successful skill, for Hilda troubled her husband with no demonstrations just now; she inwardly rejoiced in neglecting him outwardly. He went to town among his old associates—he brought them back with him; soon the castle was filled with a gay and goodly company.

CHAPTER IX.

AT first Hilda was excited by company, then she felt as though there were but few persons present, and they all alike; she was ever seeking without finding that satisfactory something or heroic someone, created by the romancer, for all who are fair or lonely. And though she desired gaiety, she was too delicately strung to bear it in excess. Nell helped her here in entertaining the guests, so that she had nothing she was obliged to do except sit, as though for her portrait, in a chair of state.

The effect she produced upon society was rather that of a phenomenon than a beauty, although she was so fair. She shrank, not

bashfully, she faced all with pale, proud looks, that insured respect, but repelled familiarity, and she and her husband were mutually and painfully polite.

Nell told her at last that she must give a concert; Hilda assented, having nothing else to do, for Mrs. Watson Smythe planned and organised every preparation. Lady Thanet had been to the Italian Opera but twice, to hear works of Verdi, otherwise she had heard no music.

The night came, and the company were gathered together in the hall, transfigured by the presiding genius of Nell into an assembly room in a first class hotel, glaring lights, red seats, and yellow fringe. The performers came through the looped-up arras at the end, and so departed. Lady Thanet sat, of course, in the front row of seats, undistinguishable from others except by her especial paleness, for in vain her French tiring-woman pleaded for rouge; Hilda knew that Gutilyn admired its effects.

First there was an overture, which she thought

mere noise, as it was, being performed by the right men in the wrong place. But Lady Thanet's ear was not trained sufficiently to appreciate either the contralto song or the soprano scena that followed. She had quite lost her sense of hearing in a dream, when the triumph of the evening arrived. This was the performance of a violinist, whose rumour had rolled before him from every shore, and who had not been heard in England even by royalty till this occasion. Nell had secured him at a cost she kept to herself, as she was afraid to mention it to Gutilyn, and knew that Hilda thought as little of a large sum as a small one.

Every one present was struck with the artist's appearance, but few admired him, though his playing astonished all. Lady Thanet was transfixed by him, it is not enough to say he possessed her in a moment, and she scarcely listened, she knew not what he played. He was not of the Paginini school nor structure, such an one would have increased by his frenzy her inward fever.

But he was calm, and pale, and thin, his countenance a mask of sorrow that could not pierce it. His forehead was snowy pure, with a frown carved between the eyes. The flesh had wasted till his nose looked too long, the line of his lips too faint, his eyes were sunk into his brow so deeply that they shone as if afar off. His hands were like skeletons in ivory, of form most rare. His hair was grey, though report said he was youthful, and through all his attenuated aspect he looked so. A reticence of manner pervaded him so rigidly that one could not say he cared for music, he might have been a deaf person listening to his own playing.

He was eminently a being to inspire a girl like Hilda with enthusiasm. The ideal halo with which her fancy had surrounded Gutilyn because he was pale and thin, which had been eclipsed by the dark reality of her position, now broke forth fresh around the stranger, this time to encircle an apparition actually poetic. Gutilyn's face she had seen too near, had studied too long,

till it had become familiar with a sickening fascination. This face she could not see as near as she wished, and she trembled to think it would fade away that night. Then she remembered that she was Lady Thanet, that Nell had told her a compliment would be acceptable from her to any of the artists, and the desire she felt to address this one only became a determination.

As he dropped the last note she rose, bowed specially to him as he bowed, though he did not see it, for he was looking coldly on the ground. When he was out of sight she followed him, and every eye of course followed her, none with suspicion of her intention, as she was not paler than before, and she moved with a step inherited from her Spanish mother, which never hurries. She did not walk down the hall, but passed among the performers, each one of whom thought her errand was to praise them, but with the haughty instinct inseparable from her education, she drew her lace dress from contact with theirs as she passed.

She was so little at home in these her halls transformed by Nell's genius, that she scarcely knew which way to take. One of her own servants saw her, and indicated to her eyes a door through which floated odours of rich viands intermingled with choice tobacco, and which led to the refreshment room of the performers. She walked in there, and saw the violinist who was just prepared to go, as he was not to play again. He had not eaten; he looked as if he never ate. He bowed, but not with recognition; he was moving past her.

"I am Lady Thanet," she said in a soft commanding voice.

He bowed more respectfully, and stood still, but did not speak. Hilda for one moment felt frightened; then her old pride rallied—had she not the right to ask?

"You played beautifully; but I have been very ill, and I could not listen amidst so many people. Will you play to me again?"

For an instant he looked surprised, as though

at the innocence of her request; for he too had his pride, he valued his playing at a price! Her beauty conquered, for he had an eye to see it.

“With the greatest pleasure, my lady.”

Then Hilda led the way to her own boudoir, having directed the servants to bring refreshments thither. When they had retired, she threw herself upon a sofa, the artist still standing.

“I do not remember your name,” she said, “I was thinking too much of your playing. Will you tell it me?”

“Naporta, my lady.”

“You are Italian, are you not?”

“I came last from Italy.”

“What was it that you played?”

“‘A triumph of Temptation,’ and ‘a prayer for the dead.’”

“Oh, the dead cannot require prayers as much as the living! Can you play a prayer for the living?”

“The joyful living or the wretched living, for there are both, my lady?”

"I know that; play both."

He played, first a warbling ecstasy which, like lark music, fills the heart of childhood; then a passion of anguish that writhed rather than lamented, as though scorpions curled alive about the strings and gnawed the fingers closed upon the bow.

"Terrible—dreadful!" almost shrieked Hilda, in accord with the woeful shriek with which he ended. She covered her ears with her hands; tears crept down her pale cheek.

"How can you play so? you must know all."

The artist instead of replying, screwed up a string. One would have thought he did not see that beautiful pure face in tears.

"Take some wine, Signor Naporta," said Hilda, chokingly, after a moment's pause.

"I never drink wine, my lady."

"Never drink wine, how strange! I do not care about it, but in stories musicians all like wine, they say."

"I am not a musician in a story; I am a poor player in real life."

"Poor! are you poor?" cried Hilda pathetically. She was recalled to Gutilyn, when she had thought him poor.

There is an infancy to the womanhood of some, such as childhood is to maidenhood in every case.

Hilda had not passed this prime, though married, she uttered her thoughts without fear, unless she detested those to whom she spoke.

"I do not mean poor in purse," the stranger answered; "I mean poor in art. Giants have gone before me."

"I never new that the violin could be sweet till now; it is as soft when you play it as my guitar or harp."

"My lady, the violin is softer than the guitar and sweeter than any harp. Like God's wind it ranges from the light breeze to the tempest. You will excuse your humble servant for saying,

my lady, that you will understand music better when you are older."

"I am not very young; I am eighteen; I was married just before I was eighteen. Did you see my husband—the Earl of Thanet?"

"I do not know that I did, my lady; my place is to play, not to examine my audience."

"But you saw me?"

"My lady, you sat in front."

"Signor Naporta, are you well in health?"

"Perfectly, my lady."

"And are you happy—happy in your profession?"

"Very happy in my profession; the rest signifies nothing."

"Signifies nothing! *I* am very unhappy." she added in a tone, as though drawn out by the magnetic volition. Surely it did not reside in him; he did not turn towards her. He replied, with averted face, still feeling the pulse of the instrument at intervals.

"You are safer unhappy than happy, my

lady, unless your sorrow is for sin; but the Father of All has sheltered you from temptation, be therefore thankful."

"I know not one thing he has given me that I care to possess."

"More ungrateful still. You are rich, powerful, of high position; you may bring consolation where you find misery; you may heal the broken-hearted, for you are pure."

His words, in their strong foreign accent, all partook of the reserve that ruled him; still he lifted not his eyes.

"I know no one who is miserable except myself. The people here enjoy themselves, yet care for nothing; at all events, no woman can be so miserable as I, for no one else has married the Earl of Thanet."

She pronounced his name with proud disgust. Then the stranger sighed, his voice altered its key, became sharp at the same time that it was mysterious.

"Duty is your mother-angel, never forsake

her; lean on her when most sorely tried, she will lead you straight into the arms of God. Lady, lady, commit no sin, nor dream it, or you will not rest in death; there are some who will not rest then, who will begin a wilder life then, more terrible, more lonely—ages upon ages before Christ sets them free."

She knew not why, but it struck her he was mad; but she was brave though pale, and she feared no man except her husband.

"I try to do my duty," she answered sadly, "but it is not my duty to love him, for he is unworthy of love."

"My lady, God gives you that temptation then, I knew it not—a husband unworthy of you in a world where so many would tempt you to love; but He has given you Duty, the mother of all the angels, to keep you at your husband's side. If you leave him for another it will be sin, and you will be tormented."

"Leave him for another!" exclaimed Lady

Thanet, aghast. The stranger's voice rose higher—to an angry agony.

"You might, you might—take care; then you would be visited by remorse, which has fastened upon me, and which will never leave its hold; no, not after death, not till all are judged—perhaps not then."

Hilda, overstrung and terribly excited, burst into a flood of tears.

"Hush, hush!" he whispered, retreating still further; "do not weep, shed no tears, or I shall melt. Hush! I will play you a lullaby; I will sing you to sleep with a hymn."

He did so—a soft sweet hymn, a melody worthy of heaven, but so faint and echo-like that Hilda was obliged to cease weeping and hold her breath, or her ear could not have reached it; and she closed her eyes, it soothed her brain, and her heart rested—she certainly looked asleep. Leaning back upon the couch, however, she felt as in a dream, that the music stole nearer, and the breath of his presence with it. He

looked at her, too, she felt, as beauty always feels when the worshipper is at hand. She soon heard smothered words, which made her feign sleep all the more; she dared not seem to wake.

“Oh, woman’s love and woman’s beauty!” in another instant his English failed him; he went on in Italian, which she understood. “The same, the same, in every face. Oh lost, and longed for! the white cheeks and warm lips—the same, the same! The hair like sunshine on the wings of an angel. Bury me in flowers, in roses; her breath is the same, the same. It is not spirit, I must not touch it; it sent me once to hell! The same, the same! but not a ghost. Away!” And then his playing, which had become a mere dissonance, resumed its tempered sweetness; he groaned low, stole away from her side, softer and softer grew the strain—then ceased.

After a terrible space in which Hilda felt as though some dreadful fate awaited her, after she had listened till she could bear no more, she

opened her eyes. He was gone, and the door which made no noise, was shut. Some minutes afterwards Mrs. Watson Smythe, who had been looking everywhere for the lady of the castle, entered. Hilda spoke sharply, sent her away, told her she was going to bed, being ill.

"If that don't look like madness," remarked Nell to her husband that night, "I don't know my own name. They always get by themselves. I shouldn't wonder if she finishes by shutting herself up on the top of a mountain, like Lady Stanhope."

"Say nothing about it," answered her husband.
"It is not our affair *unless* she does it, and the less Gutilyn is bored the better for us and her too."

CHAPTER X.

"We must be in Town next week," remarked Nell to Lady Thanet, one February morning. She had to repeat the observation.

"Must we?" answered Hilda dreamily.

"I mean all of us," retorted Nell, provoked and puzzled. "Don't you know the house is ready, and everything besides? I wrote about it."

"Which house—yours or ours?"

"Yours, of course; don't you remember you invited me to stay with you, and Watty to come whenever he can, for Gutilyn's sake?"

"I shall be very happy for you to stay as long as you please."

Here Hilda rose, and walked into the conservatory at hand. All her care seemed for flowers now; she was always gathering and fondling them. She was breaking branches from a white azalea, when Gutilyn, who had come into the adjoining room and spoken to Nell, sauntered after his wife. She looked up as he approached, her glance was calm and cold, her beautiful mouth expressed rebellion under close restraint. Lord Thanet in his short coat and long waistcoat, which looked tumbled and stale though they were quite new, was drugged with tobacco, which did not suit his constitution, and smelt of it equally with rose-fragrant pastilles. He seemed relieved at Hilda's unconcern, and began pulling at the plant she was tending. Instantly Lady Thanet left the azalea, and went to a red one a long way off. Gutilyn was, though naturally sharp, too much stupefied at present by smoking to notice this manœuvre. He followed her. Yawning in her face, he observed—

“Nell says she has arranged everything in

town, so that you will have no trouble. I told her you were very much obliged to her. I must add, however, that you must not do there as you have done here."

"What is that? I have done nothing particular; I have not been strong enough."

"You are as strong as any other woman; you are only disgracefully lazy."

Had he been doing anything besides smoke? Hilda thought so; she looked at him steadily, and his dull eyes fell.

"I only mean, my love, that you have not danced lately; it is very well in the country, where all do as they please, and while you were a bride it had a pretty, modest effect, but it will be necessary to exert yourself for the future, and I expect that you will do it."

"I am not going to town."

"What do you mean? How dare you presume; how dare—dare," he stuttered, "dare you contradict me. Would you like a lunatic asylum better?" But he spoke between his teeth,

under his breath, for he was afraid that Nell would hear.

"Certainly I should; it would be quieter—at least, I should be alone."

"But I should not," muttered Gutilyn, and he seized her wrist, and she felt in the trembling of his weak fingers that he longed to wring it. "Come, come, Lady Thanet, my pretty wife, my lovely creature, you must not speak so to any one but me; do you not know what you might forfeit if you were insane? Do you hear me—do you?" At last closing his grasp on her wrist with tighter and tighter pressure. "Do you?"

"If you will leave me alone, I will explain, but never while you touch me." He dropped his hand, she raised hers, and showed a white line where the blood had been driven from the skin; then she pointed to the scar on the back of the same hand.

"How well they match," said she. Gutilyn crouched, but his eyes gleamed like a tiger's. "I should not mind if I lost everything," she

added; “but you would, no doubt. However, this is certain, if you take me to town now I will go mad, and shall be placed in a lunatic asylum—or worse, everybody will know I am mad in my own home. I should rejoice to sacrifice all, if I could so purchase freedom from your society; yes, I would even sacrifice my liberty of person.” Her voice rang through the conservatory; he was in horror lest Nell should hear, which Hilda meant him to be. She trampled upon the flowers, she tore the ribbons from her dress.

He flung his arms about her. “Hush, hush!” he insinuated, “stay with your fondest husband, and tell him what is the matter; you are ill.”

“Don’t touch me, or I will scream.” She fled from him, and he pursued her; but when she reached the arch of the drawing-room, she checked her pace, walked slowly, and with perfect grace. To her amazement she addressed Nell thus: “Will you leave me for five minutes with your brother? I wish to speak to him alone.”

Uprose Nell, and withdrew, looking not unlike a swan on shore in her discomfiture.

“Gutilyn, I shall remain—that is, I wish to remain at Champian this season, while you go to town; first, because I wish to be alone, and next because I am ill. You do not wish me to die, I know, it might be very inconvenient.”

“My dear child, I am grieved; you shall do as you please, of course, but it is a sad disappointment to me—a blow—”

“Be silent there!” This was no vixen’s voice—it trembled. “You have not sought me here; you hate my society, and I do not love yours.”

“It is your fault, you estranged my affection; you were suddenly cold.”

“Never dare to speak of affection; you were false when I thought you true; I was true, but foolish—scarcely less foolish than you were false.” But here she smiled sweetly, as though a tender thought had struck her. “I beseech you to let me stay here. I know that I ought to ask your permission, and I do.”

Gutilyn stared, as well he might—the lesson of the minstrel was unknown to him. If duty were her angel, he wore not her mother's but Naporta's face. But the moment she deferred to Gutilyn, his insolence returned; he was like all cowards.

“Don't you know you *dare* not disobey me? ask my permission indeed!” and he advanced nearer, looking sick with rage, his hand half raised.

“Stop, stop!” she cried; “never dare to touch me. I will shriek, I will rave, I will go mad. You shall lose what you grasp after, and the whole world shall know why!”

He slunk back, with grey lips; and as for that savage violence whose records distain the history of the lower orders, known and read of all men, of course it never sullies the blazon of the higher ranks, for it is never revealed nor written.

The next week the court newsman informed his limited number of subscribers that the Countess of Thanet remained at Champian Castle in expectation of the birth of an heir. It was also

printed, on the best authority, that the Earl of Thanet, whose political interests tied him to Town for the week, made it a point to go to Champian every Saturday, returning on Monday morning. In fact Gutilyn was advised by Watson Smythe to let it appear so, and as his duties in the upper House were light—he never expressing an opinion, and therefore provoking no enmity—he was always exhausted with doing nothing at the end of the week. Then he rejoiced *incognito* in every kind of recreation which ages of experience have forced idleness to invent—nothing was too high or too low for him, but he preferred the latter. Now he crossed to Boulogne, and enacted a grand duke in disguise, a lady equally distinguished in her disguise on his arm, and Wat Smythe behind them dressed in livery. Then it was Cremorne or Vauxhall; a masque, and he danced with one dressed as a bride. His favorite Sunday excursion was to Brighton, where in the afternoon and evening may be met a fair sprinkling of disreputable persons. He mingled

with these, even to the smoking of bad cigars and drinking of wine worse than vinegar, and he most of all appreciated being robbed of his watch and purse at the railway station; not that he pursued the thieves, it was too pleasant to buy new watches, and fill fresh purses to the brim.

Meantime, Nell kept the house in Town, and very well too, though it was true that she neglected her own, and that her children were a disgrace to any rank in their handsome, dirty dresses, and rude nurse-taught manners. Also her baby was being half-starved, like Gutilyn before it. But Nell was the victim of her education; she was not wicked, and she was somewhat womanly in her appreciation of Hilda, for she actually held that Lady Thanet was not like other persons, that she ought to be humoured, and that she was a great deal too good for Gutilyn. Besides, she ran down to Champian every week, and told Gutilyn on her return that he had better let his wife alone; that she would be all right bye-and-bye if let alone, but not else.

CHAPTER XI.

HILDA was now happy, because she had some one to love, and something to expect. She was ever abroad, and ever dreaming, yet so constantly in communion with Nature that her dreams refreshed her. She had never known till now how beautiful was her home, with its ferny glades, bright gardens, and swelling river. Nor was she there alone; a spirit haunted her, and ever murmured in her ear. She met Naporta's words in every wind, her guardian genius was his face; a strange companion for one so young and fair. Yet he had spoken of heaven and virtue to her, not in the language of the cold and literal, but

with sad enthusiasm and sweet melody. Then he had flattered the haughtiness of her blood, had soothed her pride, for he allowed her husband to be unworthy of her. Mysterious had been his coming, mysterious his departure, and he remained a mystery.

Her only real companion was her old French governess, a lady of fortunes scattered by the revolution, and of the purest blood; sufficiently well-bred to be treated as an equal without desiring familiarity or employing it. She sat with Lady Thanet in the house, gave reports to the physician, and despatched to Town the daily bulletins which Gutilyn never opened, but which he now and then used to light his pipes with. There was the chaplain at Champian certainly, but he was not one with whom a woman like Hilda would ever have communicated, niched in his position, petrified into his profession, at home only at a well spread dinner table, or on a stout soft-paced mare. His patroness only saw him on the Sabbath, when she dreamed during

his nasal reading, and slept through his hackneyed homilies.

All young mothers love the unseen first-born, think of its coming as of heaven after death; Hilda worshipped hers. She dissociated it from its father, she only imagined one face now, and she rarely looked at her own beauty. It will be laughed at, yet was true, that she loved to haunt her own old nursery, freshly decorated by her hands, that she often laid flowers on the pillow of the stately cradle, drooped the lace curtains over them, and then sitting afar off, persuaded herself that the babe breathed under their shadow. More painfully she longed after the love she believed it would bear her, more passionately clasped her arms to her breast and tried to imagine it was already there.

It happened after all that the infant son of the Earl and Countess of Thanet was born before its father's return for the autumn, though the recess had begun and though he knew of its mother's illness. Nell, however, was at the castle, and

she first took the babe. It was taken of course to the nurse, after the fashion of the world. Hilda was then asleep, but she woke some hours afterwards and remembered what had happened, though she had not seen the infant. She inquired of one of the nurses who sat up with her "Is there not a baby?"

"Yes, my lady, a beautiful son and heir."

"Why is it not here—by my side. Bring it here immediately," in the most imperial of her tones. The nurse grimaced at the other, for it was in the dead of the night.

"My lady, the infant is with his lordship's nurse."

"Bring him—go for him—or I will get up."

The nurses were horrified. "Your ladyship must lie still," said the elder, who thought she had great influence over the sick.

"How dare you tell me so! how dared you take the child!"

"I was afraid its crying would disturb your ladyship."

"Disturb me—its little voice! Crying, and away from me." She half rose in the bed; one nurse held her arms while the other fetched the babe. It was laid beside her, she drew it to her heart, and both slept together.

Next morning the nurse who had been hired for its mother was sent away with a triple premium for her disappointment. For the physician perceived that otherwise Lady Thanet would die of fever produced between her pride and her tenderness.

For days in the softly shaded room there was heaven to one soul on earth, all other faces were forgotten in the little image of our helpless nature. Lord Thanet saw the babe when it was three days old, but not his wife, who tossed herself into a fever when he was named. That is to say he saw the small white bundle Nell brought in, but did not take it in his arms, only remarked that it squeaked like a puppy, and bade his sister take it out again.

Hilda was glad he did not care for it, as it

seemed to belong the more to her love alone—it was her all, and enough, which our little all seldom is.

When it was six weeks old she first saw Guti-lyn. The doctors had forbidden it because still there was the flushed cheek, the fluttering pulse, when he was mentioned. At last she asked for him—a morbid craving seized her to know what would be her feelings face to face with her child's father. It was not a beautiful babe, though pretty as all such tender nurslings are; it was white, not pink, and had elegant little hands that already clasped her finger. But by some fatality she had not examined its eyes, which it usually kept shut after the manner of infants so very young, and the colour of which could not have been traced in the darkened chamber.

When for the first time in her dressing room the blinds were all drawn up, and the light through the long windows dazzled her, she would have been glad of their green shade again, but was too proud to command them to be lowered.

It was in all that blaze of daylight that the babe was brought to her, and laid upon her lap.

The small, swaddled Viscount Sarre opened his eyes wide then, and stared at the blue sky. It was well she was alone in the room, for the eyes were the eyes of Gutilyn. One of those resemblances so literal that they are ludicrous, burst upon her, but she did not smile as young mothers are wont to do at the father's face in the first-born. Terrible was the spell, evil that inherited eye, it turned the mother's milk to bitterness. Very large, very green, with a slight cast, seeming to leer while it looked at you, even in the infant it was insolent. Hilda was bending mournfully over that glassy glance, when the Earl of Thanet entered. He had nerved himself to be amiable, and felt very awkward. Hilda knew this and saved them both by stretching out her hand as to an acquaintance. He sat down, and pretended to be interested in the child, which she made no attempt to exhibit, sitting with her head thrown back, there seemed

an immeasurable distance between herself and it. But the infant, directly it saw its father, became endowed with a new expression, it kicked its feet beneath the rich robes, and as Gutilyn, feeling he must do something, clapped his hands, it smiled—a grotesque, curled smile, not idiotic but too intelligent ; the mother turned aside her eyes.

After that morning Hilda's days grew dark indeed, her existence became a burden, for she knew that she was an unnatural mother—it tortured her conscience, but never touched her heart. For the babe grew day by day more like its father, till it became his morbid image. And in her self-conviction she never left it, it was scarcely a moment out of her arms, for she felt if any ill happened to its strange constitution she could not regret it—her devotion was not of love but of fear, lest her want of love should injure it. The physician, too, saw it thrice a day. There was never anything amiss with it, neither cough nor convulsion, yet it never looked as a

healthy child should. Its singular intelligence increased, its inarticulate noises had an eldrich significance; no angel looked out of those clear sharp eyes, that stared, that peered at everything, and they were never wet when the wild shriek of its temper shook its frame. Its hands had no cherub dimples, they were white and slender, its fingers laid hold cunningly of objects. Already it pulled flowers to pieces, and tried to squeeze the flies into the corners of the window panes. Already it yelled if kept waiting for its food, and fought those whom it disliked with its little fists. It had a goblin strength, when it was in a passion, its mother could not hold it down and was obliged to call in the nurses. But more painful and more singular than all was its instinctive liking for its father. If Lord Thanet's step crossed the corridor and the babe was asleep it would wake, start and stare, then scream after him elfishly, and hold its breath till he came. Then it flung out its arms till he took it into

his, then leapt and laughed, and pulled his hair. He did not like the child, yet was vain of its liking him, and would toss it up and down.

Hilda thanked God when it was asleep, that she might conscientiously place it in its cradle, even then she would not leave its side, though she avoided looking at it. She passed her time in a present so dreadful that she had no heart to look to the future. For her indifference to Gutilyn her conscience never reproached her, but she was bowed with remorse for her dislike to the child she had borne. Meantime her conduct was inexplicable to society, and strange rumours crept about. She would not go anywhere until the child was weaned she said, and this repudiation of the rules of fashion caused all who differed from her to dislike her, and to say that she was insane, as people had said before, and generally do say of peculiar women in high places. She saw Gutilyn about twice a week; where he passed his time between his visits she cared not the least to inquire, and she seldom knew whether he was

at the castle or in town. She never left the rooms she had prepared for the infant except for airings, and then it accompanied her, she so dreaded a disaster.

One morning, seven months after its birth, Lord Thanet came to see her; she was dressing the babe, assisted by two nurses, and as usual it was waving its hands, and murmuring, and twisting itself every way. It had left off its caps, by the physician's order, and a soft red down covered its head—the exact colour of its father's hair. Seeing Gutilyn, it shrieked as usual, and reared itself almost upright on Hilda's lap. He took it with his usual complacent vanity, its mother having wrapped it in a satin quilt at hand. It capered and crowed in its wild fashion, and Lord Thanet seeing it without a cap, seemed to consider it a boy at last instead of a small nondescript animal. He carried it in his arms to the door of the further nursery; now it had never been out of its own rooms except for airings.

"Do not take him into the corridor, it may be the means of giving him cold."

Gutilyn turned spiteful at the cold tone of her commanding voice; he did take him there, straightway, exclaiming viciously: "It is all absurd coddling! I shall show him the dogs, and very probably put him on my horse's back."

Hilda rose, and crossed the first room languidly, for she felt altogether wretched; she had just reached the door of the second, when she heard the wildest scream the babe had ever yelled—it pierced her ear; then there was a fall, a stillness—she rushed into the corridor.

It was a passage of more modern construction than the rest of the castle, being paved with marble and jasper; so rare in their contrasting tints, that they were left uncarpeted, except for a soft mat here and there. At one end was a very long window, also modern, facing the finest view of the river and hills beyond it; at the other end spread a mirror, exactly the size of the window, reflecting at once the vista and the

view. Towards this glass, Lord Thanet had carried his heir, thinking with all fathers—good, bad and indifferent—that the child would like to see himself. Within a few feet of it, the babe which had been staring the other way, turned, caught sight of its father's full-length image and its own face, shrieked with wonder, and sprang forwards with all its strange strength. It would have taken an arm of iron to hold it then, and Lord Thanet's was feeble as a woman's. In an instant it lay on the floor, having struck the back of its head against the marble.

Next moment, Hilda raised it, the maternal instinct awoke to consciousness with a spasm; she strained it to her breast. Gutilyn stood pale, trembling, like a convicted culprit.

"I did not mean to do it! I did not mean to do it!" he muttered, hoarse with horror.

"I suppose not," said Hilda, "but I bade you not carry him hither."

"Oh! what shall I do—the servants—the

servants—Smythe—Nell—what will they think?"—his knees knocked together.

"Your wife knows it was an accident, is not that sufficient?" asked Lady Thanet, with some gentleness, for Gutilyn was ashen-white. She turned back with the babe into the nursery. "Send Dr. Mellon directly, Gutilyn—go yourself," she added.

"Oh! what shall I tell him?"

Her lip curled.

"Tell him nothing, I will tell him; only send him instantly."

Lady Thanet told the physician the circumstance as it occurred, to the truth of which the child's idiosyncrasy bore testimony, as he had often remarked upon its strength as strange and dangerous. It lay with its eyes closed, like death or marble, it was evident that injury had been done to the brain by the shock. Gutilyn could not be persuaded to confess he had acted against Hilda's advice, but he did stand

by while the examination went on, though when leeches were about to be applied he turned sick and vanished. Still his demeanour softened Hilda's heart towards him, a sort of desolate and lonely hope sprang within her, that he had some kind of feeling after all.

○ The infant recovered consciousness, but was smitten beyond all remedy. Now its strength had left it, it could not lift its thin fingers. Now its shriek became an exhausted wail, and its eyes were glazed—when a candle was brought to them they wavered not—the babe was blind. Its ghastly smile never curled its pale lip, its mouth lay open with the little pearls glistening through. Its helplessness broke up the sweet fountains which its strength had frozen; its mother was its only nurse, all night she paced the room with it, for it could not rest in bed Day by day it grew slighter and weaker, its head heavier and heavier, till it could not raise itself from her breast. It languished, till without shiver or sigh, its spirit passed to God, yet in her arms and

upon her heart of love. The moment it was dead she threw herself upon her knees and thanked Heaven for its death, as other mothers thank the Source of Life for the birth of the first-born. This gratitude was not strange nor would have seemed so to any who saw the babe after death. The morbid spell of its mortal ancestry had faded into the reflection of its angel's smile. Whatever it might have been, matured to manhood, with its wild passions and fierce propensities, had fallen like a husk from its soul. It was the reward to its mother for her long suffering when she could not love it on earth, that she could love it for ever in heaven.

Gutilyn was shocked as much as he could be, that is, he had his dressing-room intensely lighted up, yea, as bright as day at midnight, and sat up smoking and drinking brandy with Wat Smythe, who had come to him directly. It was observed that Lord Thanet never looked over his shoulder in the light room till the funeral, and that he never went actually to bed. Also

Nell came, very subdued, and rustled her silk flounces.

To do her justice her better nature came out now. She made Hilda lie down on a sofa, and covered her up warm, while she herself kept watch in the room where the dead child lay. It cannot be denied, however, that she ate a hearty supper, and drank much wine in the same room, *tête-à-tête* with the nurse, and that she gossiped till even that gossip was weary, about each circumstance attending its death and its mother's eccentricity.

Hilda was, though exhausted, at peace, while she could sit beside it and watch the beautiful change death had breathed over it, could pray, and dream of heaven together, as though through her child she were already connected with the life eternal. But the funeral came—half the county invited—and it was carried out of her sight. It had not far to travel in its little silver coffin, only to the vault under the chapel where her father slept with his ancestors, and her mother far away from hers.

CHAPTER XII.

BUT Hilda's mood soon changed. Hers was too fine an intellect to brook seclusion in activity, yet she knew not how to employ her time. This was not all her trouble. The hope that Gutilyn would improve some day, that the slight feeling he had shown for his child would be transferred to her in her great loneliness, had never been fulfilled.

Mysterious were the reports concerning this husband and wife, who in public behaved the one with such pride, the other with such politeness. For though Gutilyn never paid her the attentions which even a fashionable husband will show before others towards a pretty woman he

has espoused, he was deferential, even sarcastically so. And though her dignity commanded formal respect, she concealed not, except by silence, her haughty detestation of him. She, however, in her thoughts of Naporta, was innocent—what then was he? She would not speak of him; if his name was mentioned she changed the conversation, and Nell grew indignant at this reserve. There was not another of Nell's acquaintances whose secrets she had not gathered to her heart in the earliest hours of friendship, and the demon of curiosity was always hungry at Champian castle. Her memories of Gutilyn's diabolical temper in his childhood recurred to her, and she resolved to make use of them. But hinting at them in the presence of Lady Thanet, Hilda, as Nell told her husband afterwards, "stared her down like a lioness," and would not speak to her the rest of the day, though in the late evening she stole into Mrs. Watson's dressing-room, and put a bracelet she had heard her admire on her arm.

The dresser of Lady Thanet once told Nell that there were often, “very often, blue bruises on my lady’s shoulder, but then my lady has so fine a skin that the pressure of a necklace might wound it.”

Nell gave her a handsome present, hoping to hear some more, but Hilda, who had passed the door while they were talking on another subject, guessed from their confusion they had been talking about her first; and the French woman was only permitted from that time to superintend the wardrobe; her old French governess, whose good breeding and misfortunes had made her incorruptible, dressed Hilda afterwards, having been piteously entreated by the woman she had taught as a child, to shelter her from other women. As for the maid’s report to Nell, it may simply be questioned whether a child who loves to bite and pinch can reach maturity without retaining his instincts: however, they may be mastered by moral culture, or concealed by shame from strangers. Hilda was no stranger to her hus-

band, and he knew the depth of her reserve; she would never betray him, why then had he cause to fear her? And the stony sadness of her eye, its dry strained glance, her constant pallor and rigid lip, showed more despair than dread. And she would not have preserved her health had she not lost all tenderness.

Gutilyn's companions—for he had a great many, not all of high rank, and none of any reputation—always lodged in the part of the castle furthest from the apartments of the countess. She had merely informed her husband that she would not permit them to remain where she could hear the noise of their revelries, and he removed them as we have said. Rumours of their orgies filled the county, but she heard them not; she shrank from hearing of them, and when in the country, though she was constantly in the air, she paid no visits.

One morning greatly to her astonishment—for a party of his friends had arrived overnight at the castle—Gutilyn entered her dressing-room.

Much greater was her surprise when he spoke politely in private, as he was wont to do only in public.

"I thought you would permit me the gratification of arranging a flower garden expressly for you; I have observed you take an interest in gardening. The workmen have been at it for some weeks. I dare say you remarked a high fence near the river."

"I do not walk near the river, it is damp. I am altogether amazed."

"Amazed that I should seek to gratify you?" But Gutilyn was very awkward amidst his grace, his eyes were downcast, if slyer than ever, his haggard face was flushed. "It will not be damp now," in the most insinuating tone. "There are walks already laid out. I flatter myself it is in the best taste—your own taste. I hope you will make use of it."

"I thank you."

"It has the finest view of the river. I know you admire the river."

Hilda smiled, how often she had gazed on its deep water, and longed to cleave it, nothing but her pride had prevented her, she would not have it said she drowned herself to escape a loveless life.

"May I have the honour of escorting you there this morning, just to see whether there is anything you would wish altered."

This last surprise was too great to permit remark. She rose and left the room, and returned dressed for walking. She descended the steps, he followed her, not daring or not caring to offer her his arm.

The tract enclosed was small, yet seemed limitless from the arrangement of the shrubs and evergreens. The chief of the gardeners employed had been an artist, for already each terrace was a layer of bloom. The highest terrace was the smallest, the lowest broad and sweeping, the river washed its steps. Each bank of the terraces was purple with violets, golden with primroses, but not a leaf broke the bands

of colour. On the river balustrade rose vases of alabaster filled with stacks of snow drops, and trellised arches bright with China roses were reared over the mossed stairs of each terrace. At each end were alcoves of stone fretwork carved like lace, with glass behind them, through which exotics blazed. Here were green velvet seats sunk into rustic frames, and round the frames curled real ivy. Here were green velvet footstools springing again from violet beds, and from the centre of a small marble table edged with snow-drops leaped a fairy fountain from a sculptured water-lily.

It was all beautiful, and fresh even to Hilda's fancy, nurtured upon all things fair. But she did not say so, she could not say so, for her heart beat wearily as from a wound, with the thought that she would rather have had one fond word than all this show.

"It is your retreat," observed Gutilyn uneasily, perhaps he had expected a burst of gratitude. "No one will be allowed to come

here without your permission. I hope you like it, my lovely wife."

She tried to speak, raised her blue eyes, but seeing him the sickness of her soul came back. Her lip quivered as she smiled, she bowed gracefully and walked forward.

"The flowers are fresh every day," he went on, "and new sorts every week, of course. Otherwise perhaps you might find fault with its being all the same—fair ladies are capricious they say."

"There is no fault to find." She stood upon the river bank. There were fifty swans all on the water at once, a snowy flock. And there was close at hand a pretty little boat, a frail toy, edged with gold devices, the light oars silver-handled; it was called "The Lady of the Lake." It caught Hilda's eye directly. Gutilyn observed this with an evil smile. She was looking out over the blue water. "How far does the river go," she asked dreamily. "Does it run into the sea?"

"The sea, my love? We are not at Sarre Castle. It becomes a mere brook about two miles off, running inland, Smythe says, I don't know for I never saw it. And you must not try to get so far—it would not be safe."

However, in this toy she certainly took great delight. Madame Martinet taught her to row—that lady was expert and strong at once like many among her race. And Hilda felt soothed when upon the stream; the motion passed away, if it wasted her time, and she was too miserable to dream of spending it otherwise. Misery paralyses—a great philosopher has said that to be useful we must be happy. Gutilyn once wandered into her garden while she was on the water, at rest in the middle of the stream feeding the swans, all fifty of them crowding round her. Lord Thanet kissed his hand to her from the bank and went his way.

It was singular too she thought that from this time he paid her a visit daily—she sitting in her dressing-room after breakfast. She was of

course surprised but soon became used to it, he remained about a quarter of an hour usually, and she was conscious he was watching her all the time. Not as though he suspected her of anything, rather as though he feared she suspected him. It was not so, however, she knew not enough of evil. And every day she expected he would request her to accompany him to Town that season, just opened; she meant to go if he asked her for she was weary of her quiet life, and besides had seen it written in the papers that Naporta would be in London for a little while during the summer. But Gutilyn never mentioned her going to Town, nor mentioned anything personal. Once he dared to enquire after her health, and she replied by one of the imperious and resolute glances that had horrified him when she threatened to go mad. Weeks so passed on, Gutilyn went to Town and returned, and Hilda grew weary of her garden in the midst of its spring beauty. She never knew the

want of a flower, besides she had been almost ordered to walk there, and after the first novelty, she rebelled against the charge.

She took to wandering over the castle, now empty of its guests, for Gutilyn was seldom there. Particularly in the evening she traversed the long galleries, and stole along the dim drawing-rooms. One night very late, when she felt particularly restless she resolved to explore the haunted chamber. For there was of course a haunted chamber at Champian Castle; a large low apartment near the roof, approached by a passage whose only windows were ancient arrow slits, and which had been a servant's sleeping-place, some fifty years before, until a groom hanged himself therein, having betted too largely on one of his lord's horses that lost. When Hilda was a little child she had explored it often, but always with disappointment, for she found only an old stable lantern, a heap of dusty chintz, and two long projecting closets enclosing each a bedstead, shut in by a door which only fastened

on the inside. It was said the groom had hanged himself in one of these, inside the door, so that he was not found for months. Not only had the room been deserted since, but the closet door left open—it was said it would never shut, and the locks of the other doors were broken likewise, even that of the door at the top of the passage staircase. It may therefore be readily believed that Lady Thanet was startled, when she had mounted the steep steps, to find that door fast closed. She had brought no lamp, being in a mysterious mood, so she could not see the handle, but by moving her hands about she found it, it was round and smooth, little like the old latchet she had seen in childhood. She trembled a moment, then with strong self-contempt she turned it—she entered the passage itself. Nothing here was altered, at least she thought not, through the old arrow slits the blue shade of the night sky peeped as in her childhood, and one was pierced by a long moon ray which guided her to the door of the haunted room. She

reached it, and was not now surprised to feel another handle, fast closed like the first.

It was not fear that caused her to return and fetch a light—it was simply a putting off for a little time of some shock she knew would befall her—but this presentiment took no form, save that she felt her husband in the midst of it. She bore a little lamp from her dressing-table, and again crept up the stairs. The handle was of polished ivory and looked quite new. There was a key in the lock, inside. A dark carpet muffled the passage though she had not discerned it in the moonlight. The handle of the further door was silver, also fastened.

She shivered a little, then listened—she thought she heard a voice: she opened the door, but did not advance, cold spasms checked her feet; with cramped fingers she clung to the lamp, only her sense of sight retained its keenness. Yet she saw not the rose coloured walls, the velvet gaudy with gold, the gorgeous pictures, the lamps in their frames of turquoise and

frosted silver, the white satin couches with their swansdown cushions. She only saw her husband, bending over a woman who was seated in the midst, a woman dark and beautiful, and starred with brilliants; against whose black locks gleamed the sickly face of Gutilyn with its smile, the smile she once thought so soft and sweet, when it only woke for her. But he saw her not, he was too absorbed and interested; he was not feigning then. Vehement and idolatrous words burst from his lips—those drove her back, she fled. She sat upon the bottom step awhile, for she thought she was dying, and she longed to die; she would have liked him to find her there dead. Her time was not come, she was too new to sin and sorrow, discipline had laid upon her but its lightest stroke. Back came the life, the pride, flushing her cheek, firing her eye, the anguish again gnawed upon her heart. She returned to her own place.

She passed the night in the first chair she took after she reached her dressing-room; she would

see no one, and she locked the door. She slept not, yet felt not weary; wept not, only thought. Hatred did its worst, it shook her like a reed, but neroism conquered. We will not call it goodness —it was simply virtue.

She rang her bell next morning, and enquired whether Lord Thanet was at the castle. The maid replied that he had gone to Town by the first train, had been fetched by Mr. Smythe. Lady Thanet sent the maid away, saw all the servants out of sight, and then went the way she had taken the night before.

But now the first door was locked. Should she go back now? there was time. And the pale face and quivering form betrayed the struggle between will and power. She pressed her brow with her hand a moment, then knocked but very low; none heard nor answered. She deliberated no longer, but knocked again this time with all her strength, her whole imperiousness. Soon the key turned, cautiously; some person peeped forth, and was about to shut the

door in her face. But she pushed it vehemently and slid through the opening, passing on. The woman who had opened the door was not the one she sought, and one glimpse at her bold eyes curdled Hilda's blood. She looked no more, and when she felt herself drawn back by her dress, she tore it away, leaving a great piece of the fine muslin in the creature's hand. Then ran, rushed, through the other door, and locked it inside.

The broad daylight streamed on the rosy velvet, and made the satin couches look like heaps of snow. Before a great oval glass in a china frame sat the being she had come to rescue. The carpet and the table were strewed with splendid dresses, feathers, flowers, strings of jewels. The girl—she was a young girl—was only half dressed, her vestments of lace and cambric costlier than Hilda's own. She was small, of complexion golden-dark, the light caught her black hair in ripples. Her brow was low and crescent-like, her cheeks carnation, her

lips deep red and full. Lady Thanet did not hesitate until she looked up; then she knew not how to address her. For those golden-dark eyes had no human expression; she stared at Hilda like some wild animal startled from its thicket. Like a wild bird's was her cry.

"Clorine, Clorine! how dared you let any one in?" and again, "Clorine, Clorine!" and then she flung her comb at Hilda, and then she stretched her neck and shrieked again.

"Be quiet," said Lady Thanet in her low, measured voice. "I have locked the door. I wish to speak to you alone."

"Speak to me—*me*," prolonging the word into a scream.

"This is my castle; I am the Countess of Thanet."

The girl laughed scornfully, went on brushing her hair, and gazed at herself in the glass. Then as Hilda advanced a few steps, she hit her wrist with the brush, without even looking at her. Hilda wrenched the brush from her hand.

"How dare you strike me? I came to give you some advice, to which you shall listen."

"Advice from you, to me!" The creature rent the whole lace off a garment as she spoke, and then tore it into strips. "Burst the door, Clorine, Clorine! here is the madwoman tearing me to pieces. I shall be scratched to atoms. Help!"

She poured forth shriek on shriek.

"She shall not come in; I am not mad," said Hilda, in a clear melancholy voice. "I can turn you out of the house if I please, and Lord Thanet knows it too. Listen to me, and I will be kind; I wish to do you good."

The creature lifted her black eyes with a show of attention at these words. Hilda thought she was touched—she was only curious.

"Now," said Lady Thanet, "I am not going to tell you you are wicked, because I do not think it is your own fault. And *you* have not made me unhappy, because I do not love my husband. But I loved him once, till I found he

was false. If he tells you he loves you it is a lie; he told me so. He will break your heart, besides making you wicked. That is the first thing."

"And the second?" lisped the girl insolently; Hilda hoped she was interested.

"I want to take you from him. I want you to go with me before he comes back, and never to see him again. I will help you, and you shall learn your duty, and I will forget all that you have done, and be your friend."

The creature laughed again. No marvel, perhaps, at such a rhodomontade of innocence, ignorance, and womanly charity.

"Will you come—come now—I shall not ask you again; this is the last time. I thought you would come—you cannot love him!"

"Love him!" shrieked the girl with another yell of laughter.

"For the last time—come!" cried Lady Thanet commandingly, with heightened tone and kindling blood.

"No!" And sneering from lips like roses, she spat upon Hilda's hand.

Martyrised by pride—by disappointment, for she had never doubted her own success—Lady Thanet cast upon her a glance of awesome anguish, and withdrew. The devil for the hour had conquered the angel, but Satan's agent was a man.

And in that hour Hilda determined to go free. No misgiving as to what she had to do, nor perplexity how to do it, staggered her a moment. Once more in her dressing-room she rang for her maid—it was a little past noonday—and ordered a cup of coffee. In the maid's absence she gathered together some bank notes, also took a purse of gold, and placed altogether in her pocket. She had never carried money about her before, but she fancied she might possibly want some. She took no other relics; no, not a locket containing her child's hair, everything connected with Gutilyn was to be as in its grave. Nor did she

carry any ornaments, saving only the watch she wore: and when the maid returned she had put on her usual walking dress, for she did not wish to see her governess, whose eye was keen. She drank the coffee quietly, and dismissed the maid, saying she was going to her garden. The woman stared, for her lady had never condescended to explain herself before.

Hilda reached her garden, and gazed around her from the lowest terrace to see that she was not watched. No one was near, except the swans who approached her one and all. But she drove them back with her parasol, and stepped into the boat. She might have driven herself to the railway-station, three miles off, in her pony carriage; but it satisfied her to escape by means with which her husband had provided her. Standing up in the boat, she drew from her finger the nuptial ring, and cast it into the rivulet. Then drew on her gloves, and calmly took the oars.

Rowing with all her strength—with great fatigue—she passed the wall of her own grounds in half an hour. Then she felt free and safe, even though a boy gathering water-cresses paused in his work to stare after her. The soft breeze blew behind, and now and then she rested, the boat moving very slowly, like a leaf over the ripples, it was so light. Soon the bank fell on the one hand to a waste of bean fields, on the other a meadow full of butter flowers. Then there was a brick-field, with a line of pollards in the distance; now the bank grew higher and more irregular, with rushes on each side; and here the stream narrowed suddenly, suddenly grew shallow, as Gutilyn had told her, it shrank into a brook. Only so frail a thing as the toy barque with a freight as delicate as its mistress could have held its way, and even that would be checked in another instant, for Hilda saw in front a mass of alder trees, and in their shade a little distance further, a plank thrown across the

brook. But before she entered the alder shade, she espied a narrow flight of wooden steps on one side of the bank, which painted black and half hidden in the long grass, she had not at first perceived.

CHAPTER XIII.

"AMIE, my dear child, put your music away now, it is time to work."

"Oh dear, Miss Ward, how quickly the time has passed. Are you quite sure there is not a minute more?"

"Look at my watch. You began at nine."

"Yes, I know; but I can't help being sorry. Shall I put the cover on the harp?"

"No, ring for Mary, it will save time. I want you to help me directly, I have so much to do, and your little fingers must fly for yourself and me too this morning."

"I'll try."

The last speaker was a little girl of eight years old, tall and beautifully made, with an enchanting countenance. Her plain dress of brown holland fitted to her tiny throat without any trimming, its broad bands buttoned round her slender wrists. Her shadeless golden hair was cut close to her head, but its short ends curled like tendrils on her temples. Nothing could denude her of her loveliness—no costly investiture could have enhanced it. By her side, when Miss Ward addressed her, had stood a child's harp in a black frame, without a touch of gilding; it was now being concealed beneath its baize cover, and the infant artist followed it with wishful glances as it was carried away. Then she sat down by Miss Ward, and opened a large plain work-box, took off the table a huge garment that half hid her little person when spread out, and began to fit the seam herself, and then to sew.

They were sitting in a pretty low front room, divided from one the same size by an arch. The

furniture was rich but sober, and all old-fashioned except the French windows, and their long white netted curtains. The front and back windows looked each upon a garden—that in front shaded by silver birches—which gave to the cottage its name. Two splendid specimens of these graceful trees stood beside the garden-gate; one side of the house was overgrown with grape-vine, on the other gleamed a long row of beehives—too many together to look picturesque; and in the room the only relief to the pale grey furniture, might be traced to one or two engravings from Scheffer's sacred pictures, which adorned the walls.

Miss Ward was making out accounts—not merely her own domestic ones, those were slight enough—but for half the parish, and for certain public charities besides; that is, she took the disagreeable parts of business, knowing they stood the least chance of being well performed. She regulated and restrained the expenditure of every poor family she knew, with their consent;

she was to them so sweet and gentle. She had fourteen hundred a year, and did with it more good than even benevolent persons do with fourteen thousand. She had schools, too, in which she acted upon method instead of model; her boys' and girls' schools were *schools*, her infant schools were nurseries.

The beautiful child who lived with her, whose genius she already traced and loved—yet trembled for, was her choicest charge; none knew how sadly dear, nor how much of bitterness, of deadliest woman's sorrow, she had borne for her sake. It was, as Lady Courtoun told Hilda, reported that the child was her own, but it was not true that all believed it; no poor friend of hers did, how many soever of her acquaintances among the rich delighted to accredit anything against one so blameless before the world.

It was twelve o'clock.

"Come darling, put away your work, it is time to play," said Miss Ward to the child. "I

fear, Amie, you will not get your walk till after dinner; I am so busy."

"May I stay and help you then," asked the little creature, tenderly, but most respectfully.

"No: I wish you to go out in the garden now."

"Then *might* I practise?"

"No, no, not this time! You must water your seeds now the sun is off the front. and as, perhaps, you will be out after dinner."

The fairy ran into the hall, took down her straw hat, and went out through the back glass-door, then round into the front, with her watering-pot.

She was giving the mignonette bed in the midst, a drenching bath, when she heard carriage wheels. Miss Ward, too, heard them stop at the gate, but she did not look up, being accustomed to enterprising visitors of all sorts—some who came to lionise her as the offspring and literary legatee of her father, many who came to petition—driving thither in carriages to

plead for those who had none; she was invariably not at home to these, almost always to the former. But Amie in the garden looked up, wondered very much, and then ran to open the gate, seeing a lady alight from the carriage, as she thought it—a mud-splashed cabriolet, with shakey steps. But the lady who had alighted excited the child's mind.

She stops at the gate; she says, looking down into the child's fair eyes with eyes as lovely: "Is Miss Ward at home?"

"Yes, Madam: I'll tell her directly."

The lady had not looked for the bell beside the gate, and had ordered the coachman to drive off, so that it had not been rung. She followed the little girl to the front door, at which Amie wrapped with her knuckles. Sometimes she did so when she wanted to speak suddenly to Miss Ward, who was, if strict, most tenderly indulgent. She rose from her books unruffled, and came and opened the door.

"Miss Ward, dear, a lady wishes to see you."

Miss Ward led the way into the parlour, the door of which Amie had thrown open. Then the well-trained child withdrew into the garden again, keeping, however, near the parlor window that by chance she might catch sight of the lovely lady, or hear her voice.

The lady had thrown herself upon a sofa with closed eyes, as if exhausted; and Miss Ward, still standing, gazed upon her as in a dream. No one who had seen that face could ever forget it—Miss Ward remembered it, but could not recall whether it had visited her asleep or waking; she was a person whose experience taught her that acquaintances may be made in dreams.

“Are you ill?” she said gently, at last, for the lady had hidden her face now, and for the first time since her flight given way—she wept.

“Yes—no: you do not recollect me; wait one moment”—here she sobbed. “I remember you so well! I never forgot you, nor have seen any one like you in this dreadful world; and you

are a woman—that makes you more precious!" She wept with increasing passion. Then Miss Ward left the room, and returned with a little of that rich wine used at the most sacred of feasts. She offered it—it was refused; and then, at once in her own place, Miss Ward poured the choice cordial down her visitor's throat by force.

"I thank you," said the recipient, with that proud courtesy which only reflects from high places, implying a favour done in *accepting* an attention.

Miss Ward smiled. "You are better now, and must not weep. Can I be of any service?"

"I am Lady Thanet. You know me now."

"I do not, I assure you." Miss Ward felt disappointed, she had wished to identify her.

"Ah!" said the other, drawing off her gloves impetuously, and clasping her white hands, "I was not married then! and Lady Courtoun did not introduce me to you though I wished it. I loved you in that moment, and in my trouble I

thought of you, and longed to come to you, and when all was over I came."

"You are in trouble then," asked Miss Ward simply, without the least awe of her visitor's rank so haughtily asserted. "Can I help you? Lady Courtoun is a good friend of mine."

"*Can* you help me? You must! I came to you—you can help me to the only thing I want now."

"Name it pray, and I shall be very happy. You have been ill, I see, Lady Thanet."

"Do not call me that accursed name. I am *not* Lady Thanet."

"You said you were," answered Miss Ward smiling. "But one word, your ladyship's carriage is gone."

"My carriage? I have none, I have flung all to the winds. Oh! Miss Ward, I never had a friend before—I never asked a favour. You cannot be so cold, so cruel, if I ask you a favour—I—"

"It would make little difference, dear Lady

Thanet, what person asked me a favour, if I could grant it in obedience to my duty. But my means are very limited compared with yours, and I scarcely think it possible you can require anything of me."

"Have mercy! do not speak so. I am most distractedly wretched, and have come to you because my heart sent me—not because I knew no one else in—"

"In what?" for Hilda hesitated.

"In your rank, and wish to know none."

"My rank is not so high as yours, I have often wished it were."

"Do not wish it, it would bring you agony."

"I do not mean for what it would bring *me*, but for the power it would bestow on me to help the helpless."

"Help yourself! you would then be helpless, bound in prison—in hell."

"That is incredible to me. You are under a hallucination, a mood. But once more, Lady Thanet, how am I to serve you?"

"By allowing me to remain with you, at rest."

"What do you mean? I do not understand."

"When I saw you I was just going to be married. I was a happy girl, now I am an unhappy woman, so unhappy that I cannot tell you, a woman, how. But being a woman, you must believe it, and help me—oh help me!"

"As you allude to your delicate domestic affairs, I presume that I may. Do you mean that you have differed with your husband?"

"Differed—he is dead to me."

"He has left you then?" with sad not soft sympathy.

"No, I left him—yesterday, and will never return to him."

"And why have you come to *me*?" Miss Ward sat silent awhile, she turned her face from Hilda, and wild shadows crossed it, her serene expression was torn as with tortures of the thought. Once, tears swelled in her dark eyes, but she dried them with her hand before they

dropped. When calm again she spoke. "My dear Lady Thanet, I am much surprised and shocked."

The splendid eyes, the pale beauty, had then appealed in vain; but not the look which followed. For as Hilda rose in all her pride and desolation, to pass out again and perish—so she thought—she sank back on the sofa conquered by exhaustion, the faintness of fatigue sharpened her face like death. Miss Ward, who knew every portent of illness, was not alarmed for the event, only aware that it would be impossible to refuse her rest just now. She began to remove Lady Thanet's walking dress with her quiet fingers.

"Let me go to bed; I have not slept so long." Then she cried again more weakly and with less control.

"Do not weep, it will fatigue you more and perhaps may fever you."

"I cannot help it."

"Everyone can at first. Come, Lady Thanet,

recover yourself I pray—I wish to take you up stairs."

These words severely uttered, gave Hilda strength—the strength of pride. Miss Ward would have supported her. Hilda would only follow her, and crawled up stairs into a pretty room bathed with green light from the vine curtains, with a large bookcase and a high old-fashioned bed—this was Miss Ward's own chamber.

Miss Ward left her there, having watched her till she slept, until the evening, and then returned. She made Hilda eat and then sat down beside her; but Lady Thanet would rise and go down stairs, her tragedy was burning at her heart and she longed to pour it from her lips. She told her story in its outline—nothing private—only what the whole world knew of her husband's neglect and coldness, but not his cruelty. And she suppressed every other incident, even that in which Naporta figured—nothing that a woman should hold secret escaped

the veil of her reserve. Miss Ward listened, pale and patient. Hilda expected she would weep, and at the end fold her in her arms, as overwrought as she. Oh no! to the last words, “What shall I do, I came to ask you?” was this reply, “In the shortest words you must return. I have done what I could to prevent your incurring any trouble, and have written to the Earl of Thanet.”

Hilda white with terror and contempt, spoke not, but rose and rushed to the door. Miss Ward followed her quickly, seized her hand firmly, as she would have held a delirious patient’s, drew her back and forced her into her seat.

“How absurd! my dear Lady Thanet, listen to me for a moment. I have not given your address here—I mean my own—I merely said you were safe, paying me a visit, and that you would return in a day or two, at the latest.”

“What did you write to him for? He does not care, and I should not choose him to believe I thought him uneasy.”

"How childish—forgive me! How you can speak so, act so, I cannot imagine, knowing your duties, as in your position you must have been taught them."

"My duties? I have none."

"Your vows before God!—you are married. I shudder at an oath; from breaking it I revolt."

"He broke it first."

"He broke his oath?"

"I cannot tell you how, but so it is."

"Have you shown him the love you promised?"

"Yes, once, and now I have done the best to show my hatred."

"Then, Lady Thanet, there is but one way. You must return and repair that wrong; you must yield him the allegiance which you owe to him and to none other—no, not yourself."

"Is it the story of Griselda you wish me to enact?" asked Hilda with a sudden scorn."

"Better than that you have enacted hitherto. You believe in one common Father?"

"I must, for he has my child in His keeping."

"Your child, Lady Thanet? You never told me—"

"There was no occasion; it was not the innocent I wished to accuse."

"Well, hear me now. I felt for you deeply; I thought there were excuses to mitigate your folly, but I see none. No, if you have been a mother you are a child no longer. A child should teach its mother every duty, and it *does* in creating the duty of a mother."

"I should never have left it. I was always with it. It sprang from its father's arms; there is murder on his hand!"

"I am ashamed of you. It is ridiculous to suppose for an instant that a man of high rank should wish to lose his heir. But we are wasting time. From brutal violence you might be protected by the law."

"Would you appeal to it pray, if your husband played off tiger-tricks upon you? Confess it? Sue for protection from other men?"

"Certainly I would, if it broke my pride down

to the roots. Certainly, for the sake of other women—of society."

"I would not. However, *I* have no brutal actions to record, of course;" a smile of disdainful significance drooped her lip.

"All the rest you must endure. Think of the excuses for his utmost misconduct now. Were your behaviour blameless you would win your reward in time."

"I know not a reward *he* could bestow."

"His esteem, which must follow, confessed or not. Perhaps his love. Certainly, that love which will be our life for ever, which saints and martyrs seek *alone*."

"He cannot esteem—he is too vicious. He cannot love—he is too entirely of this earth."

"There is an hour when those most of this earth are severed from it. In that hour you might be the angel of his redemption. But your pride must be humbled for that end! But let us speak rationally as well as religiously.

What a shock to the social circle where you are so conspicuous ! What infinite mischief you may commit through your example ! Return, return, before a breach is made. Your servants need know nothing, and Heaven will smile upon you."

" Ah, you have never suffered!"

" Sister ! you are fair—I am faded. Had you suffered as much and as long as I, you would shrink from blazoning forth your sorrows. You would set a watch upon their grave."

" I confided alone in you. What right had you to betray me?"

" The same right you had to thrust yourself upon me—a stranger!" retorted the singular woman, ever self possessed.

" Well, what then will you do if I tell you I will not return."

" I can no longer shelter you."

Shelter her ! shelter the Countess of Thanet ! The proud blood blushed through her brows—then subtle thoughts arose which she chose not to betray. She smiled, her gentle courtesy re-

turned. "Will you turn me out to-night?" she said.

"You shall be to-night my honoured guest, and like a noble virtuous lady, worthy of the race she represents, you will again adorn the home which would lose so much in losing you."

"You are very kind—I shall not trouble you long. I would leave you to-night, but that I cannot make arrangements."

Her calm manner deceived Miss Ward, who began to talk on other subjects, courteous as her guest.

CHAPTER XIV.

VERY late in her house for such a meal, Miss Ward ordered tea. As Lady Thanet entered the room, little Amie who had been seated, rose, curtseyed, and remained standing. She felt an instant awe of the lovely pale lady. Miss Ward was not going to introduce her—"Sit down, dear," she said in a low voice—but Hilda went up to the child, passed her hand under her chin, and gazed upon her thoughtfully, then kissed her brow. In a moment Lady Courtoun's hints recurred to her—she had quite forgotten them in Miss Ward's grave company, and from that moment her advices fell to the ground. Not on this account, but fascinated by the

child's beauty, Hilda watched her almost without attending to Miss Ward's conversation, so earnestly maintained, for she seemed desirous to draw attention to any subject except the child.

After tea Hilda went to the sofa. Amie running into a corner, was bringing out her harp. Miss Ward followed her directly, and said very low, "Not to-night, my love—go to bed now."

Hilda turned her head. "Oh, do not send her away! What is it she wishes to do?"

"To play," answered the little creature, advancing towards Hilda, not looking towards Miss Ward, whose glance of inquietude warned her against the act. "I play one hymn before I go to bed."

"And do you sing it, too?" asked Lady Thanet, taking her small lithe hands.

"No," whispered Amie; "Miss Ward used, and to make me, too; but she allowed me to play it only when I prayed her, because without words it sounds like angels' voices."

"Dear little girl—do you love music?"

"Dearly, dearly," whispered the child, thrilling Hilda's hand by the pressure of her little fingers, fervent as her words.

"Will you play me that hymn?"

"May I, Miss Ward? May I? as the lady wishes it."

There was proud blood in the child, too; it dyed her rich lips as she questioned permission, having been once refused.

"Miss Ward!" thought Hilda, "what a strange fancy to let the child—her child perhaps—call her Miss Ward. I would not do it; I would not be ashamed of it if I had done *that*, and the child should not suffer for want of my love. But perhaps"—here Lady Thanet's mood was changed at once and entirely by the child's waking touch—Heavens! what a touch. So firm and pure, and the feeling all infant passion—Love without fear. The execution very formed for fairy fingers, and charming by its slightly monotonous expression, an expression inseparable from the

playing of the very young, and from the singing of the cherub choir-boy, however clear.

"Who taught her?" asked Hilda, deeply struck and instantly reminded of Naporta.

"She has a master."

"Oh, what is his name?"

"Olivare."

"I never heard anything so strange," said Lady Thanet. "She has the touch of a gentleman I heard play once, and I thought she might be his pupil. She has too a look of him," added she dreamily, and her eyes rested upon the child while a soft suffusion flushed her cheek.

Very uneasily, Miss Ward whispered, "My dear Lady Thanet, you will excuse me for requesting that you will not talk about Amie before her. It is good for no child to be the centre of attraction."

And Hilda said, "Nothing could hurt *that* child," feeling less respect than ever for Miss Ward's opinion.

It seemed that the child had heard nothing

of these whispers, she had thrown her arms round her harp and kissed it, then wrapped it up and carried it away, then returned and curtseyed to Hilda, who kissed her fondly, as though she actually held part in her first love's mysterious story. Then Amie ran out of the room, and danced upstairs, and her merry foot-step was heard on the floor above.

Miss Ward showed Hilda to her room, and would have acted as her lady's maid, but Lady Thanet pretended she could undress herself, though what graceful awkwardness she committed after left alone, what wonderful discoveries and difficulties possessed her, can only be explained by the result—that she lay down in her clothes upon the bed having succeeded in loosening them. Miss Ward, whose busy day had been curtailed by Lady Thanet's visit, would leave nothing standing over till to-morrow, and she worked and wrote till two o'clock, then went to bed so tired that she woke later than usual next morning.



She would not rouse Lady Thanet till breakfast was prepared, and then she carried it to her room. She knocked—there was no answer. She looked in; the curtains were drawn all around the bed, and the blind was down. Miss Ward believed her asleep in the depths of exhaustion, and retired for another hour. But at ten o'clock she grew alarmed, and having knocked loudly thrice with no result, she entered. As we may suppose, but as she had not suspected, Hilda was gone. But the bed had been slept in—perhaps she had only just fled. Not one of the servants could give her the least information, until having searched those in the house she bethought herself of the gardener, who knew nothing of what took place there as he slept at his own home. From him she learned, that while he was mowing the lawn behind, at five o'clock, he saw a lady open the back glass door and descend the steps.

"She went round front," added he, "but I didn't see her face, and thought it was our

own mistress a' going out to see the poor folk as she often does in the morning."

This was all true, and also that Lady Thanet climbed the gate of the front garden, having found it locked, walked to the little inn whence she had taken the cab the day before, and which was only two miles from the station, and was driven in the same cab back to London. Miss Ward went to the inn directly, but could get nothing out of the proprietor, nor his wife, nor any one of their retainers, all of whom Hilda had fee'd as though she still ruled over the coffers of Champian Castle. Nor when the cab returned with its weary nag from town, could Miss Ward even induce the driver to describe to her the lady he had conveyed, for Hilda had been most afraid of him and had therefore bribed him highest.

This time Lady Thanet had ordered him to drive her to a West End hotel, and as it was an hotel she knew, it was of course the worst place for her concealment: she only longed for

a place in which she might struggle and rebel at will; and she was more rebellious than ever because she had been unable to control Miss Ward. With her she had expected rest, and homage with sympathy—a mixed treatment so necessary to the proud woman who had no experience of life at large. And her pride suffered more than her heart at the rebuke she had received, cold as the life she had left, and more common-place than its repose of luxury.

Miss Ward's letter, sent by special messenger, was duly received at Champian Castle, but it was not opened directly, because Gutilyn was in town. For the woman in the haunted chamber had revealed to him the scene between herself and Lady Thanet—revealed it because she hoped it would estrange him yet more from his wife. For the vicious hate virtue in its most childish form, and know well that those who have *made* them vicious hate it more. The creature had laughed over the recital, not so the listener, he was pallid with terror. Always a coward, what

had he not now to fear from his wife, who was also his benefactress in so far as the wealth he worshipped was concerned. None knew how much she had lavished on him during her love, and none how much he had drawn from her without her remonstrance, for still she was glad to hold him thus her debtor.

So Lord Thanet had hastened to town directly, to acquaint Watson Smythe, and make him act for him, as he always did. But Mr. and Mrs. Watson Smythe had gone out to dinner in the next county, and were there to sleep. They returned next morning while Gutilyn was yet at breakfast, and then it all came out. Mr. Smythe's observations on the subject were sound and valuable. That in the abstract, it was a troublesome occurrence. That everybody knew she was an eccentric woman and would not be surprised. That she was haughty though eccentric, and being recovered—which, of course, she would be!—she would never mention it, for her own sake. That she was known not to be

a woman of fashion, women of fashion having too many affairs of their own, to look into the private ones of their husbands. That she ought to have been obliged to them for keeping things quiet, instead of having another establishment in town and being talked about. That by hiding his mistress down there he avoided any scandal, for servants told so many lies, that the truth when repeated by them, gained the reputation of a lie only. That Nell, finally, would manage all as she had done before, without bothering him; and that he could lock her up when he caught her if he chose, and nobody be the wiser!

But lo! much to her lord's astonishment, Nell was troublesome, and showed more feeling than she had ever done.

"I don't like the affair at all, Watty," she observed; "and you may depend upon it I shall take her part. I don't care what they do to most women, for they're as stony-hearted as I am myself; but if she could do that—I mean try to persuade that wretch to leave him—she must

be very different from me, and all the rest.
Didn't I see her when the child died?"

"But you will act for us, Nell?"

"I'll do everything for her I can, but I'll not take Gute's part. Why shouldn't they be separated at once?"

"For God's sake, child, don't mention such a thing; you don't suppose Thanet would consent?"

"And it wouldn't be easy without, certainly. Oh, Watty! what a good thing for me and you too that I have no heart; for all you men are alike—first for yourselves, second for your purses, and last for your wives, even if you are faithful to them."

Nell and her husband were still closeted together, when a messenger arrived from Champaian with Miss Ward's note. This changed all. Gutilyn fell into a fury which endangered his health; with swollen veins and livid lips he cursed and yelped—yea, like unto the dogs he kicked down stairs. He let down a leaf of the dining-table

covered with decanters and dessert; then enraged with himself as if another, he threw dregs of wine in Smythe's face, and drank brandy and water in quarts—being too feeble to absorb the spirit only. At last he had a bleeding at the nose, so violent that it forced him to lie down quietly—coward as he was—lest he should die of depletion.

Nell professed herself not the least surprised, but went into her room and had a good cry while she dressed herself to go to Champian, in order to discover how many persons there were acquainted with the flight of Lady Thanet, all of whom it was needful to bribe to silence. Meantime Smythe departed for Miss Ward's house, and, as we know was natural, found no Hilda there. Nell reached Champian before night-fall, and set off with a lantern to follow the course of the stream, for she missed the boat directly. Plunging over fallow and through furrow, followed only by a footboy, she reached the little village—or rather single street of little

houses, which had sprung up since the railway had been carried through the county, and planted one of its stations two miles off. Nell enquired at all the houses, and found at last the information she wanted at the neatest, which had a geranium in its low front window. It was here Lady Thanet had halted, paid the labourer who inhabited it, more than a week's wages to fetch her a fly from the railway station—and here, while waiting for it she received her first impression of struggling yet spirited poverty.

We regret to say that her first impression resembled that of the foreign princess, who recommended her father's starving subjects to eat plum-cake. But she was as yet only a foreign dove escaped from a golden aviary. Nell also enquired for the boat—for she respected it as a relic, but it was already broken into pieces by the boys who had found it empty in the brook. Then Nell went to the railway station, but she there discovered nothing, even so fair a lady as

Hilda had escaped observation in the crowd. She returned then to Champian, and there received a telegraphic despatch from her husband implying that the troublesome, delicate bird had flown further still. But in these days of detective genius, it is almost impossible for a disguised thief to escape, how then a woman whose decided beauty is susceptible of an accurate portraiture, and who has taken no precautions to change her dress or manner. In twenty-four hours it was known that Lady Thanet was at Clinton's Hotel, under the name of the Countess de Beauvoir—a title picked up from a novel; it never occurred to Hilda to adopt a lower style, she would not have endured it.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. SMYTHE's sagacity warned him that it would be very difficult to get Lady Thanet back by force—it must be contrived, like many other noble actions, by fraud. Nell was a troublesome agent, she refused to fetch Hilda back. She even tried to persuade Gutilyn to allow his wife to remain away awhile, as is sometimes known among fashionable persons, always under her own name, however. But Gutilyn, in part affected through his bloodless selfishness and fear of being recognised what he was—a coward, raved and foamed liked an intoxicated idiot, and nothing could make his rage human save the

promise of an immediate restoration to his possession of what he had never valued, a promise made by Watson Smythe with little hope of fulfilment on his own part. Of course Lord Thanet angry as he was, was too timid to go to his wife himself, he was sick with terror at her haughty frames, and frantic for fear, seeing him, she should fulfil her promise of acting madness to his detriment. Yet one could see by the evil lines that crept round his thin lips, by the savage trouble of his bloodshot eyes, that if he killed her through it, his should be no passive vengeance.

Meantime through the inferior mind of Mr. Smythe an idea had darted as into a superior one—for it was certain to be successful if it could be carried out. It caused him to say to his wife, “Mrs. St. Leonard! she will do it—why didn’t I think of her before?” And he was driven to her house directly.

Everybody in Mr. Smythe’s circle was acquainted with Mrs. St. Leonard, none knew her,

he thought he did, but it was she who knew him. A widow of an uncertain age, she naively asserted that she had been in youth a beauty, and was generally believed. For her dull grey eye had ever a gamesome sparkle unless she was *alone*, and her thin lip wore a smile which was the seal of fascination. Had a physiognomist caught her in repose, he might have decided upon her character in her features, but they were never still, her face could twist itself into any shape, and she was never surprised without that smile of the lip, that sparkle of the eye. Such a spoiled fool among fools was she that no one enquired as to her antecedents, though it may be their unpenetrated arcana deterred gentlemen from wishing to marry her. Still she carried off her charms and their admiration with so high a hand that almost every man thought his neighbour had offered her his affiance, and she made as though she would have accepted none.

She spoke tenderly of her first husband; certainly he must have liked her, for he had left her

a large fortune. She professed to have been married in Holland, and also professed such anguish of memory when her early life was recalled to her, that few persons cared to encounter the tempests of hysteria their suggestions raised; she was further assisted by their preference to talk about themselves. She could be all things to all persons, and she was specially agreeable to the vulgar among the great. She copied the little oddities of every titled person, and rendered their absurdities with such refinement that they admired themselves in her, as in a too flattering looking-glass. Yet she had the intense inquisitiveness, the all-leveling perception, which is never, perhaps, found in persons of the highest blood. She was, if fine with the refined, vulgar with the low, her only intimate friend was her butler, who much resembled her, but who was never seen by her friends, only by her servants. Perhaps the secret of her popularity lay in the fact that she would do anything for anyone. I do not mean any one greatly in need: she never

gave a loaf, a fish, nor a brass farthing in charity. But if a peeress had a refractory or an imaginative daughter, Mrs. St. Leonard would be invoked, and could almost always prevail with either—her literal presence scared poetry away, her audacity petrified rebellion. She would lecture a young *roué* before his mother, and with money out of her own purse would cover his indiscretions, blotting them out, she would say, meantime, with her tears. She allowed poor high ladies, whose pin money was scantier than that of citizens' wives, to have bills at the West End shops in her name. And she paid them, too, though she seldom paid her own. She lent her elegant carriages freely, and would pass them on foot in the park without bowing even to those of her intimate friends they contained. The best thing was to see her with authors, whom she magnetised through their vanity, whose brains she sucked in their trances, and whose rhapsodies she repeated as her own. To give a finish to her character, she had set up as eccentric, being

clever enough to know that she had neither grace nor genius to support her popularity without. Thus she wore very remarkable bonnets, very singular boots; she skated on the Serpentine in a riding-habit in winter; and in summer she bought and ate strawberries in Kensington Gardens while the band was playing. She had a pelisse lined with the skins of innumerable dogs she had loved and lost, and a muff that once formed the hairy tabernacle of an Angora cat; and she danced the polka in costume at her own balls.

When Mr. Smythe's brougham drew up she saw it, for she was always looking through the blinds, though she always kept them down. She had never been more than good-natured to him until his connection with the house of Thanet was rendered illustrious by Gutilyn's marriage with so great an heiress as Lady Burthred, since then he had been the dearest of her friends. When the invitations from Champian were first issued, Mr. Smythe contrived to send one to

Mrs. St. Leonard without Nell's knowledge, for Nell did not like that lady, and was sometimes even rude to her, though she did not even know why she disliked her. Mrs. St. Leonard would have given anything to go to Champian then, but she dared not leave a certain Marchioness who had lost her husband, and who being immensely rich, employed Mrs. St. Leonard to amuse her, without paying her. Now Mr. Smythe rejoiced she had refused the invitation, as Hilda in that case would have recognised her, and she would have been as useless as the rest.

"I am delighted to see you—sit here by me. Now I know you have come on very particular business—I see it in your eye. That is kind: now I call that friendly—employ me, I beg," she thus ran on till he stopped her in vexed tones.

"Yes, most particular and plaguing. You have heard of our sad calamity?"

"No, indeed—Lady Thanet gone at last, poor thing—dead of consumption, as I predicted?"

Now Mrs. St. Leonard had heard of it through

her butler, who had heard it through the servants, who had heard it through other servants—such news begins to circulate in the cellarage of society before it reaches the air.

“Lady Thanet has forsaken her husband—he is heart-broken.”

“Poor dear young man—such a magnificent young fellow, and she I have heard a vastly pretty woman. I should fancy,” sinking her voice, “that there was something wrong in her head after the birth of the heir.”

Mr. Smythe frowned and bit his lip.

“Never mind, it’s quite safe with me. I always find out those things. But with whom has she gone—not with—”

“Nonsense, nothing of that sort—she knows no one, has not an intimate friend—she was brought up quite aloof. She is close by here, at Clinton’s. We traced her easily enough, but do not know how to get her back, and I have come to you.”

"Any little disagreement—circumstances of a strictly private nature?"

"Not at all," said Smythe eagerly, "mere girlish whim; she does not like the restraints of her position, and loves novelty like a child. Indeed, she is but one."

"And you're afraid she won't come back with you?"

"I fear a scene at the hotel, you understand?"

"Ah! didn't I say so? a little touched. Never mind, I never tell secrets, and everybody tells me theirs. What do you propose to do?"

"I wanted *you* to be our confidential agent."

"I should not like to take such a liberty; your own dear wife is the proper person," said she, diffidently.

"It *must* be some one she does not know. Any one of us would excite her, and her fancies are—well—are quite a lady's. If she could be brought *here*, for instance, the hubbub would not signify."

Mrs. St. Leonard looked the other way to hide

her pleasure. She loved interfering between a cat and dog, how much more between a wife and husband in a high family? She sat and mused, but it is probable she had made up her mind at once.

“Has she any money?”

“The detectives got a chambermaid in their pay to search her effects; she has no jewels but a watch she wears, and only two ten pound notes, unless she carries any on her person.”

“She has changed her name?”

“To the Countess de Beauvoir.”

“I shall go and send up my card—an old friend of her mother’s, who has discovered her—and at first I shall take part against you all and humour her; shall seem to sanction her step, tell her you are close upon her, and offer her an asylum here.”

“Splendid! Capital! You are indeed a genius; and I meantime shall wait here.”

“Just till I can tell you the result; then slip out, and when I have her here I’ll undertake to

make her return of her own wish, though I shall still escort her. The indiscretion shall be placed before her in such colours, that she will be only too thankful to exhibit her penitence to her dear injured husband. My sympathising compliments—Tell him an old woman, whose heart is young, is at his service in this sad affair, and assure him that the most maternal delicacy and dignity shall be preserved."

But woe to the agent of the detectives! Hilda had seen the maid as she left the room, and the girl's countenance struck her, though stolid it was full of awe. For Lady Thanet's presence had subdued her at first, and she felt a certain terror in ransacking her clothes. Hilda went into her room; there were all the things as she had left them, so it seemed, but she turned them over and found a slight soil on one of the few cambric handkerchiefs she had bought the day before; for she had been out the very afternoon she arrived at the hotel, before the alarm was given. This finger mark struck Hilda, and

directly after her breakfast, she had gone out to walk. As few persons as possible were employed to watch her, therefore it chanced that she crossed the vestibule unperceived by any of her spies. But from a window the chamber-maid spied her in the street. Just as she turned the corner a carriage drove up at Clinton's portico. Mrs. St. Leonard stepped forth, and delivered her card to her man.

“The Countess de Beauvoir.”

“The Countess de Beauvoir!” screamed the chambermaid, losing all control and rushing down the stairs. But Mrs. St. Leonard silenced her with a look of iron surprise, and whispering sternly bade her hold her tongue. The twain walked together into Hilda’s drawing-room.

“Is her ladyship out?” asked Mrs. St. Leonard with a sinking heart.

“Only this instant gone; but she’ll be back, she went out last evening and returned. She must come back, for she has left her things. And I am sure she suspected nothing, for I saw

her walk up the street as composed as could be."

"Go, child, and look if she has left her money; that will decide it."

"Lord, no, it's gone from under the handkerchiefs!... What shall we do? shall I run and tell the pelisse?"

"Hold your abominable tongue," cried Mrs. St. Leonard, wringing her wrist violently: "you must have been seen, you fool! Tell me which way she went?"

"Turned the corner into Regent Street."

It was true that Lady Thanet had taken all her money, having left more than enough to cover her bill, however, in a china cup in her drawing-room. And it was true that she did not mean to return; this time, however, she had formed some plans. The results of her meditation all night—for she had not slept—induced her to think she should like to go upon the stage. As she had read of it, it seemed not only easy but delightful, and as to her own feelings on the

subject she feared no influence. Whatever affection she possessed was with her parents and her child in heaven; whatever interest, belonged to one who had addressed her as a parent might a child, until his madness seized him. And she feared not Naporta—mad; neither was it likely she should meet him, she only longed to hear him in that world she sought.

She passed one after another of the open-fronted palaces, those enchantments won from pure material. At last she paused, it was at a music shop whose name she knew. Upon hundreds of pieces Nell had sent to Champian for her that name appeared, upon countless songs beneath bright pictures she had read it, and it alone had recurred to her—Leprince.

The proprietor of this establishment, was, fortunately for Lady Thanet, not English. She had a vague trust in continental courtesy, which had grown, strangely enough, out of her foreign romance-reading. She might of course have been wrong, but in this instance she happened to

be correct. She entered the shop, the master was not there, for she enquired. Fearful of losing a moment she asked to see him, and one of the many young men went down the shop, and returned, followed by a tall portly man with dark hair and moustache, splendid whiskers, and an open, serenely satisfied expression. He approached Lady Thanet and made her a bow more gracefully recognisant than any she had seen in her own saloons. For he recognised her style directly, felt her beauty, almost felt her position as he gazed.

“Monsieur Leprince?” asked she with timid stateliness.

“I am Leprince, Madam, your servant.”

“May I speak with you alone?”

He led her, without speaking, through a glass door lined with red silk, into a handsome room containing a magnificent piano-forte, a turkey carpet, leather chairs, a writing table with a Russia leather desk and a massive silver ink-stand. Everything in the style of the owner—

large and looking very good. And actually as Hilda gazed upon him, she felt in him an irresistible confidence—a benign influence led her there, that of the Genius of Art, which he exerts even in the lowest of his circles.

"I disturb you," said Hilda; "you were writing, Monsieur Leprince."

"Madam, I am too much honored that you command my time."

"I suppose you have a great many candidates for the stage?"

"Pardon"—without any smile—"I do not receive any. I only engage singers for my concerts, and those I do not instruct. But I can give you any information, Madam, should you deign to question me."

"Is it difficult to act?—does it require much study?—would they employ an actress at once on the stage?"

Not a smile even now. "I don't think there is any difficulty for genius and inclination, but it

does take time to train them, and they must submit to certain laws."

"Is it an expensive course of study?"

"Rather so, to study with the best, which you, Madam, would prefer."

"Is it cheaper to learn to be a singer?"

"Ah, if a singer has a great voice she is sure to get on."

"But I have not a great voice; I only sing to the guitar."

"The real guitar?"

"The Spanish guitar; my mother was Spanish—"

"Madam, pardon me, should you object to touch the guitar for my ear, and to sing a few words? I could then judge."

"Not the least," said Hilda, as though replying to the request of a visitor at Champian.

"I will fetch a guitar of Spain." He went into the shop and returned in a few minutes, its case in his hand. But now his handsome countenance was full of portent. "Madam, may I

ask you to step upstairs? In the drawing-room we shall not be heard. I always take ladies there who come about the concerts."

Not the least afraid, she followed him. He closed the door of an elegant drawing-room, and stood as far as possible from the chair she took.

"Madam, I took the liberty to ask you up here, because when I fetched the guitar a manservant came into the shop and enquired if a lady had been there? I answered him, many ladies during the morning. Madam, he described your dress, I did not say I knew it, and I made to my young assistants a sign which they understood. I said it was impossible to describe one dress when I had seen so many. And I added that you were not in the shop at that moment, which he could see. I have come to inquire whether you desire me, Madam, to repeat that you are here."

Hilda moaned like a child, could not speak for a moment, then running to the door she locked it.

“ Hide me! hide me!” she cried in anguish: “ I have done nothing wrong. Hide me! I will tell you afterwards—only hide me now, and my gratitude—”

“ Rest tranquil, Madam, I am your servant. Rest here, you are safe.”

He unlocked the door, went downstairs; till he returned her heart beat as though it would burst her delicate breast. Her terror, her agony were at their flood-tide. Even when he returned, calm and grave, she fancied him Gutilyn ready to spring, like a tiger, on her exhausted frame. But his genial voice gave her instant strength.

“ I found the fellow there, Madam, and also a lady, whom I have not seen before, but who does not resemble you. She said a lady had been seen close by this shop, and had been seen to enter a shop, but no one knew exactly which. I replied that no lady had been here since one came whom I was about to take to my wife—pardon me, Madam.”

“ Are they gone—is he gone?”

"Madam, they are gone, but they will probably return, for they may find some one who really saw you enter. And, Madam, employ me quickly if you choose. I know enough of physiognomy to know that you are in trouble, and that you deserve not your misfortune."

"I see how it is—I am lost if I do not trust you. I am the Countess of Thanet."

Leprince bowed low.

"I have left my husband, and he is trying to recover me. He hates me—I do not love him. But I did not leave him because he made me miserable, I left him that I might not grow like him—for like the spirit of evil all things turn evil in his sight."

Pale as death, with an energy that seemed to rend her soul asunder, that lent a pathos beyond all tragedy to her tone, she yet looked so like a child, pleading with the strong man against the strong, that Leprince felt no compunction in fulfilling his romantic impulse. His great heart bled to see so pure a woman suffer.

"Quick then, Madam. At my little country-house is my wife—she will be proud to receive you. I will drive you there immediately, after leaving directions with the men below."

"But if they come again while I am there—if they see me in the street."

"There is a back way, if you, my lady, will for once excuse it. Time is precious." And as he went down stairs alone, he observed under his breath, "So these Englishmen persecute their wives sometimes, though it is so domestic a nation."

In two minutes he returned, offered Hilda a glass of fine liqueur, which she drank, and then preceded her to the back of the house on the ground floor. A large yard surrounded by a high wall, led into a square which contained mews on three sides. Leprince glanced round, and then beckoned to a groom who had just put the horse to a brougham and was standing at a stable door. The groom brought forth the brougham; Leprince, with a thousand apologies

which, however, he did not pause in his arrangements to utter, handed her in, drew the blinds down, closed the door, and mounted the box beside the driver. It was so he usually drove out of town to dinner.

A drive of an hour brought them to a pretty villa, the sweetest of retreats so near the great West-end. Leprince opened the door of the brougham, and sent the coachman to knock.

"My lady, you wish to be unknown here—command me."

"I think I would rather not have my name mentioned. But Madame Leprince—"

"Oh, my lady, my wife will be too much honoured in receiving so distinguished a person incognito. She is not curious."

Indeed it seemed so, for when Leprince threw open the door of a room looking to the sunset, and Lady Thanet entered, a very charming dark woman rose from the sofa at her husband's glance, greeted her at once with respect and winning kindness, and led her to the sofa. Then seeing

the beautiful face she smiled and sparkled, betraying no more surprise than if she had expected it. Nor—what seems incredible—did she telegraph one look of enquiry at her husband. Certainly she must have been a genteel savage, or—a Frenchwoman.

Leprince seemed so well aware that his wife would know how to behave that he left her alone with Lady Thanet.

“I am much indebted—much!—I can never say how much—to your husband. He has saved me from great trouble this day. But if, in allowing me to rest here, I inconvenience you—” Hilda’s sweet eyes were raised to the dark, bright eyes of Madame Leprince.

She spoke English—though she did not speak it so fluently as her husband—because the lady spoke so. Her broken accent rendered this rude language gentle. “She was too much flattered—she was sure Monsieur Leprince was too much flattered—she begged Madame would not mention anything, as that she could not like. She begged

Madame would allow her to assist her in removing her dress. Would Madame walk upstairs?"

Hilda was glad to do so, and reached the pretty bed-room with great content. When she came down again she looked round the room she had first entered. What was wanting there? Hilda fancied she had seen some children quiet in a corner, whom she was too much agitated to remark especially. Madame Leprince had accompanied her up-stairs.

"Did I not see some dear little children? Where are they now?"

"I thought they must be troublesome to Madame. They always know they are to retire when visitors arrive, unless they are wanted."

"But I do want them so much—may I see them?"

"Certainly, Madame."

The next moment they appeared, two little boys in dark blue pinafores exquisitely made, and a baby in its mamma's arms dressed in white, its sleeves tied up with very narrow

scarlet ribbon, and little gold rings with coral spots in its ears. The baby so enchanted Hilda for the moment that she scarcely examined the other two, until tea was prepared, when at her request they were allowed to remain at table. The baby was sent away during tea, with a maid who wore a pink muslin dress and beautifully embroidered apron. Tea, however, was only prepared for Hilda, a charming *etui* being placed before her, besides enough delicate dishes to constitute a refined dinner. As for the little boys, Hilda had never seen such charming children, the eldest large and handsome like his father, the younger soft and round, with his mother's pleasant eye. But their manners amazed her, they never spilled their milk over their dresses, nor stuffed their mouths, nor required mugs. They chattered together in the sweetest French, like an articulated warble. After tea the eldest brought a book of French engravings of costumes, and the little one staggered under the weight of a stand to hold it.

The eldest explained the costumes like a fairy man, and the little one broke in with his whispered "Ah ça's," and "Tiens, tiens!" As for the baby, crying seemed to it an unknown art, it required not to be nursed, but sat on a little cushion on the carpet and played with its mamma's feet while she, respectfully withdrawn from her guest, embroidered a miraculous shirt-front for Monsieur Leprince; even when it desired to go to bed, it merely stretched its arms and pouted its cherry lips into a kiss.

When the pictures were exhausted the eldest boy observed, "Madame is very fatigued; shall we not perform a little *pièce de théâtre*, my brother and I?"

Hilda astonished gave them leave. They acted a scene from a vaudeville with inimitable prettiness and wit. Then Jules, the eldest, sang a song of Béranger, and Charlot beat time with a drumstick. Then they fetched two little concertinas, and played a short duet. At last Charlot, who was not three, yawned, said

"pardon, Madame," immediately, but was evidently tired with his exertions. Then Jules stepped up to his mamma.

"Is it not that I should assist my brother to bed, in order that thou remainest with the lady?"

As for M. Leprince, he never once intruded, but smoked in his dressing-room all the evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE night of Lady Thanet's escapade from Leprince's, in Regent Street, there was a large party assembled at the mansion of the Countess of Hulse.

It was not a ball, nor an assembly, nor a performance of carpet theatricals, it was a literary and artistic *réunion*. But as literary persons will not talk among themselves, and artists not unseldom fail to talk at all, there was also a miscellany of amateurs who would listen to both.

Lady Hulse was neither young nor old, neither handsome nor plain—an indifferent person, except to her own impression that she was a woman of

genius. She was of course a patroness of genius, but she also desired that genius should patronise her. She was *really* a generous patroness to men, that is, she invited them to grand good dinners—honor to her for that! and she allowed them to surprise her alone at any time in the morning before dinner. But woe to those authors who fell into the fashionable trick of adopting a dubious pseudonym! Lady Hulse always believed that any work she admired *must* be written by a man, but if she chanced to discover it was a woman's she cared no more about it, and never read any book by the same writer after. Women who wrote were contemporary enthusiasts, nothing more, and never went to her parties because they were never invited.

Lady Hulse always invited Mrs. St. Leonard, though she did not know where she had come from. But Mrs. St. Leonard could amuse anyone, and any number of persons at once, and she took all the foolish young men off Lady Hulse's hands. For Lady Hulse had plenty to do with her authors

who had written books that season—only that season—and her authors who had never written but once, and relapsed into silence fearing to nullify their fame—her calm, self-adoring poets, and her wild boy-muses, whose conversation threatened to break into verse—her artists who exhibited at home—her artists who exhibited abroad—her artists of fellow rank, who did not exhibit at all. Then came her musicians, but they gave her the least trouble, because they played or sang, and kept their little mutual misappreciations among themselves.

Lady Hulse was anxious for Mrs. St. Leonard to arrive this night, because a new genius, a man as well as musician, had been procured by her at great trouble on the occasion. He was a transcendental mystery, with an ideal head, so she exclaimed, or rather whispered; and it was by a revelation of her fascinations and her resources that she had procured him, for he had been to no private parties this season, and everybody said she must have offered him an enormous sum for

his assistance, as many noblemen and great ladies had been rejected in offering very considerable ones. None knew how it happened. But Lady Hulse, who, to do her justice, treated all artists as her equals—some too that did not deserve it—never sent servants to speak to them; she went herself. And she had been to Naporta's and been kept waiting half-an-hour, neither when he did appear did he apologise for keeping her. She observed not his wild glance, only his violet eyes, not his singular smile, only his hushed manner. At first he had refused to play at her party, and she despaired, but it happened that she paid him some really warm compliments about his playing at Champian Castle, and reminded him, with a species of wheedling determination, that he had not refused to play there.

"I was new to England then," observed Naporta.

"You do not like us then—"

"I did not say so. Cannot all who choose to hear me attend my concerts?"

"Ah, you are very cruel. I wish it so very dearly—"

"Stay one moment"—a ray of strong intelligence flashed from his soft eye. "Do I not recollect—surely yes. Did I not see a lady, a fair white lady, very young there? She sat in front, and divided my thoughts with my music. Ah, poor one, I remember all!"

Then his voice grew hushed again, Lady Hulse's heart beat; she was as excitable as a girl of seventeen.

"Was it not the lady of the castle? Will she be there?"

Now Lady Hulse had sent an invitation regularly to Lord and Lady Thanet, for all her parties, because she had been to Champian, besides herself a member of the older nobility, she liked to keep up the fraternal form. She had sent one now, though, of course, not expecting it would be accepted; she made use of it though, now.

"I firmly hope so—you are interested in Lady Thanet?"

"Not at all—why should I be? I beg your pardon. My lady, I shall be happy to attend you."

Lady Hulse was delighted, but pique mixed with her pleasure. He was not interested in that insane girl whom persons were afraid to speak of—who had no genius, no enthusiasm!—and yet it was evident he was coming on her account. Lady Hulse sighed, then offered munificent terms. Naporta cut her short, saying that if he came he should come as an amateur, not as a professor. Still he would play, of course. And he nearly forced Lady Hulse to leave the room by pointing most obviously to the door. And whether Naporta was mad or not, it is certain he was cynic enough to know that she would not repeat either of these facts, because she would have people believe he came on *her* account, and that she had paid him.

Lady Hulse, however, did not feel sure he

would come, and on the night in question she was in a state of excitement peculiar to her. She fanned herself violently, talked nonsense with the wise, and said clever things to the foolish, all the while keeping an eye on the door. Meantime persons of distinction made amiable observations to each other.

"I wonder how she got him here."

"He is not here yet."

"But he is coming."

"I hope so."

"There goes Beaufit with his everlasting dampers."

"Do you observe she has not her real diamonds on?"

"I dare say he is a humbug."

"Not an unusual character to meet here."

And so on, as is the custom in society behind the scenes.

At last it happened that Naporta appeared at one door while Mrs. St. Leonard entered at another. Lady Hulse flew to the stronger at-

traction, and was so long talking to him that at last he remarked, "I detain your ladyship," rather as though her ladyship were detaining him.

She looked round, the music room was deserted, all had crowded into the drawing-room except the artists, "Lend me your arm, Signor Naporta," asked Lady Hulse, taking it, and so taking him with her into the crowd.

What a crowd! all round Mrs. St. Leonard, who was speaking in a low and solemn voice.

"What *are* you all doing?" cried the hostess with petulant grace. "My dear Mrs. St. Leonard, your magnetic powers become dangerous for us all."

Mrs. St. Leonard held out one hand and with the other raised a handkerchief to her eyes. "My dear friend, such a piece of news—such an adventure; sad, sad! and secret, but I must tell you."

"Have you not been telling them all?" asked Lady Hulse leading her away, but still holding Naporta's arm.

"Ah! it must come out; and it's better that a friend should give the true version before the enemies issue their editions—that's what I always say."

"What is it then?"

"Lady Thanet, you told me you had invited her again, and had been accepted."

"He accepted."

"Well you won't see him either—she is gone."

"Gone—whither?"

"No one knows. I have been consulted and went after her. So far did the poor dear young man confide in me; but she has gone."

In tones passionless and satirical, Naporta was heard to mutter, "She has not gone to drown herself—Temptation!" and then he shuddered. Lady Hulse shivered in sympathy, she was very susceptible.

"My good Signor Naporta, how you horrify one."

"*You* must have made away with her, I should say," observed Mrs. St. Leonard, in her

schoolgirl fashion. Lady Hulse was charmed to see that Naporta's expression was bitterly triumphant. He was *not* then interested in her, except in a manner that did not matter.

"My dear Mrs. St. Leonard, I must hear sometime all about this sad affair; but as you know Lady Thanet was no friend of mine and that Signor Naporta *is*, you must help me to get these good people quiet, that we may hear him play."

So Mrs. St. Leonard returned into the midst, and very soon *had* them all quiet, because she was telling all sorts of stories about all sorts of persons. Not Lady Thanet—that theme was soon exhausted. For those who love scandal do not care for scandal which concerns people they do not know. Hilda was a stranger there; only a few among the more fastidious recalled her splendid pale beauty, and that with a sort of spectral admiration such as follows the young and fair over whom the grave has closed. The men, however, one and all, looked at each

other doubtfully—round Gutilyn a morbid suspicion clung in their idea; *they* at least did not believe his wife had committed *suicide*. All the women believed she had gone with a lover—but what mattered it to them? Except so far, that they could now generously allow her charms.

When Naporta first entered the room, a certain Lord Wilbraham, who bought the best new pictures, had observed to one Lord Seabright, who had the finest old ones—

“What a singular coincidence! I met that fellow this morning in Franke’s studio.”

“The great Franke? Why how did you get into his studio? He lets no one in I heard.”

“I had a *carte blanche*. I knew Franke at Rome, and he dined with me, poor devil, whenever he had nothing to eat. The *éclat* of acquaintance is reversed however; he is very condescending to *me*.”

“Ha, ha! What kind of fellow is he?”

“Well enough; but *that* fellow, who and what is he? I went to see a splendid piece of work of

Franke's, and it was so far from finished that I was surprised he even let *me* see it."

"What subject?"

"Of all the subjects the least classical—the nearest marble though; a monument, over and above a sarcophagus."

"For whom? A nobleman who has lost his wife?"

"My dear fellow, when noblemen lose their wives they cannot afford to pay three thousand pounds for a tomb; they want the money for the next wife's *corbeille*."

"Three thousand pounds! You joke?"

"Certain: Chawley told me, and he always knows the figure."

"Ha, ha! And you met this man—this fiddler there?"

"I did indeed; he was standing before the work—the screen undrawn; and it seems to me that he was criticising; he had a cane he was pointing about with. Franke did not expect me, I could see, and blundered out some apology to

him; but what was my amazement when he told me, as soon as the fellow was gone—and he vanished directly I went in—that he was the purchaser."

"He acts for some one else then; some rich incognito who wishes to expiate his errors."

"Hush. Franke assures me that this man buys it himself, has paid him down, and is waiting for the monument to be finished in this country, and for nothing else. He will take it Franke knows not where, but though mysterious, he has some vanity, for it is first to be exhibited."

After Lady Hulse's guests were gone, Naporta, whom she had detained, was conducted by her to her own room, which could scarcely be called a boudoir, it was such a fancy fair of a literary strew. At three in the morning, she desired to converse with him upon art. For an idealist she was a substantial woman, and very sensible, she did not despise those who ate and drank. But Naporta would neither eat nor drink, he would

only stand and look into the fire, leaning one arm on the mantleshelf.

"You are interested in Lady Thanet, and her sad fate has troubled you?" She could think of nothing else to begin with.

"Interested, madam?"

"You know her very well, I suspect. I *fear* you were interested in her," with a confidential smile. "But these things cannot be helped. She is very lovely, though painfully peculiar."

"She is lovely, but I am not interested in her. I am not interested in any lady, madam."

"Fie, fie! What a confession. And yet perhaps"—with a sigh, "artists should be free, and genius bound even only by chains of roses, cannot soar."

"Madam, no man and no artist can be free."

"They are not servants to art—art on the contrary, serves them. Is it not so?"

"I have no genius then, I am a simple player. Would your ladyship wish me to play?" with a sneer on the lip and a melancholy glare in the eye.

"You must be fatigued; I wished to talk to you. I love to throw myself into the inner life of artists. Theirs is so far beyond the life of the literary."

"If your ladyship will excuse me, I will then leave you. I *am* fatigued, and besides that my conversation has so little culture—I have had so slight an acquaintance with books—that it would be an impertinence to pretend I could cope with your ladyship in your communion with those high subjects. I keep my own place."

He bowed; Lady Hulse put out her hand; he did not touch it, only bowed again. Lady Hulse rang her bell angrily, for she was vexed, and when he was gone had a good cry, for she was disappointed. She had taken a fancy to him, and wished him to like her. Here was all hope of a friendship between them at an end.

Next morning little Amiel was standing at the front window, while Miss Ward was at the table.

The child suddenly exclaimed: "There is a gentleman at the gate—a strange gentleman!"

"Then, my love, do not look out of the window."

"But I cannot help looking; he is so strange. Miss Ward dear, I wish you would look at him. Do pray, come!"

The child's importunity struck Miss Ward; she approached the window. Her hand was on the shoulder of the child, who had withdrawn behind the curtain. In an instant Amiel felt the hand quiver; she trembled beneath the strong, wild pressure. Miss Ward thrust her aside then, and shrunk herself behind the curtain. A livid and ashen gloom rushed over her pale face; she wrung her hands; she shook and shuddered. But only for a moment, the next saw her calm and still, and she addressed Amiel in her tenderest voice and kissed her as she spoke:

"Go into the other room, my darling."

The good child went.

Then Miss Ward rang the bell. "Susan," said she to the servant, "tell that person at the gate that I am not at home."

Miss Ward had never uttered that fashionable fib before, she was so strict. The maid stared.
“Go directly, and do not unlock the gate.”

Then Miss Ward locked the door of the room she was in. Soon there was a knock, she opened it with caution.

“The gentleman says, ma’am,” observed the maid, “that he will wait till you come home.”

“Ah, he is an imposter,” said Miss Ward coldly. Again she locked the door, went into the back room, tore a sheet of paper from her desk, and wrote some words upon it, sealed it up and took it to the door.

“Give him this,” she said to the maid: “do not open the gate, and come back directly.”

She did so, and soon the street door was shut. But all that day Miss Ward kept Amie in the back room, would not suffer her out of her sight, all that day, kept the front blinds down, took no walk, did not even allow the child to run into the back garden; no hymns of angels pealed from the harp that evening. And all that day, and

late into the night a slight thin figure of a man crept, crouched behind the sweetbriar hedge of the front garden, and there peered through its green shade and pale roses a face of spectral beauty, with lines of dim despair and eyes of awful anguish.

CHAPTER XVII.

WOULD Hilda be spoiled? she was petted at Leprince's. The morning after she arrived there she felt no difference between it and home, so sedulously and softly was she served by Madame Leprince, who stole into her bedroom when the bell rang, bathed her face, gave her a fresh perfumed handkerchief, and brought her a breakfast as dainty and as delicate as any she had ever eaten. Afterwards Madame opened the door of what an English family would have turned into a dressing-room, but which was very nearly filled with a bath; then she left Lady Thanet awhile, and returning made all ready before the table for the toilette.

Hilda felt it quite natural to place herself under Madame Leprince's hands, but presently she could not help saying, "I never had my hair dressed so delightfully, I could go to sleep while you brush it "

"The hair of Madame is so soft and so superb that it dresses itself."

"Your children too are so clever with their hands, such wonderful little boys."

"They are good, Madame, but not wonderful for France."

"You love France dearly; I wonder you left it."

"Ah, Madame, it is because England is generous as well as rich."

"I hope you will not think me curious, but have you been here long?"

"We move about, Madame, and all have been kind to Leprince, though none so kind as the English."

This was Madame Leprince's point—her husband, of whom she was both fond and proud.

"Ah, and he was always musical. I should like to hear about you; you are unlike the persons I have seen here."

"Madame, we live so near England in France, that you would not guess how different we are. But France is not so rich; she has had so many troubles."

"Is your husband as fond of France?"

"Perhaps not, Madame; he has other blood too, but not I. My husband was at Erards'—and they are the princes of generosity in Paris—he ran about with parcels, he showed off the instruments, for he learned soon how to handle them if not to play. One day he made a little valse which he was whistling—he whistles, Madame, like an instrument,—and M. Erard heard him and thought he was touching one of the flutes. He was surprised, wrote down the valse, and when it sold, which it did well, he presented Leprince with the entire profits. He was but thirteen then, and he saved and saved; people thought him miserly, but he had good

reasons. He had no one to support—an orphan—but no one knows how many sous he gave to the unfortunate. When we were married he told me his plans, and we still saved. I was a *bouquetière*, and many Parisian ladies sent to me because I consulted their toilettes in preparing their bouquets. We had one small window in front and a back room; and when Leprince returned from Erards', where he still was, he made bonbons in the back room, and I prepared fancy cases for them, and little paper flowers. I also had a manner of preserving cut flowers in summer until the winter, when they cost so much, then mine were always fresh, and could be sold cheap. So we got on by little and little, till at last Leprince could form a band. There was some jealousy at first, as there is among the most amiable persons, Madame, but when they heard his valses, they forgave him all."

"And you have not suffered?"

"We have had misfortunes, Madame, but they have passed. Once our London house was

burned down before there was time to insure it; Leprince has also been deceived, and has been accused of imprudence. But I who know him best, know that he has great honor; and those who despise his great concerts, and call their programmes trifling, do not know that he loves the best music best, and will in time produce it."

"Are those concerts very great?"

"Madame, as great as the greatest theatres will hold."

Madame Leprince might have wondered that she had never heard them; but no, she was too sweet-tempered to be angry, and that she had not heard them increased her sense of Madame's high position.

Hilda re-seated in the drawing-room with the baby on her lap, began to consider that she would not stay there long, if she even could. It was not because she was not comfortable—too much so; but she had that dreary longing for action, that necessity for employment which

presses on those who are in the midst of trouble they cannot grapple with; not your defined trials of death or passion, but the mystery of melancholy that seizes the unoccupied heart. At first she had thought of requesting Madame Leprince to allow her to be governess to her charming children; but when, at her entreaty, they came to do their lessons with their mother, and she heard Jules first repeat answers to history and grammar, and geography, then say poems and fables so fluently, that she could not follow his French; then read Italian sentences and translate them into French, then French into English, she gave up the idea of teaching such a child in despair—he knew more than she did. Even Charlot went beyond her in his sharp explanations of the little tales and legends his mamma repeated to him—their lessons a sweet moral, or a tender Catholic truth.

That evening she requested to see Leprince. She spoke of singing or playing in public—he would have assisted her there; but when she

touched the guitar and raised her voice, it was but music for a garden serenade or delicate boudoir. There was not strength in those tapering fingers to attain the vigour which, next to courage, is the most essential quality in public performance; nor was there the genius which rends asunder every with of weakness. She was a perfect woman—that was all. Leprince did not hide from her that he despaired of her success as an artist; and then she observed that she could teach.

“Pardon, my lady, you would only be fit for high families, and there you would be known—discovered. As it is perhaps only for a short time—”

“A short time! What do you mean?”

“I meant nothing, my lady, except—”

“What then,” asked she impatiently.

“That we should be too proud if you would remain with us, until you return.”

“I shall *never* return!”

Leprince shrugged his shoulders; it was not

easy for him to believe that so beautiful a woman could endure a vulgar life.

"Then always, Madame, remain; at least while you will."

"You are very good. But do you think I would remain anywhere? Even if I did not feel it impossible to burden you, I should be resolved to work as other women do who have no home—I have put my home far from me; I must take the consequences, and I am proud to do so."

"My lady, should you not consider those consequences?"

"I have considered them; they are simply these: I have no longer money nor acquaintances—I believe I have no friends. I daresay you would advise me to act differently, you would, perhaps, tell me I do wrong, and I should not take your advice, so it would be ungrateful of me to listen. You see, Monsieur Leprince, that I could not remain indebted to any person who thought I was not acting rightly. On my own conscience I repose alone,"

"Madame, I do not presume to advise. The conscience of one so young and fair must be tenderer than that of a man of the world, like me. Besides, I am not English, and it is possible I might misjudge their motives, because I do not comprehend their characters. You did me the greatest honour, and paid me the highest compliment, in believing me worthy of trust. I believe I am so—at all events I will do for you whatever you may instruct me to do, except recommend your ladyship for a teacher, as that you are incapable of—too fragile and too fastidious."

"You might add, too ignorant. I know less than your sons do now! But surely there is plenty to do in a land like this, where even foreigners find employment."

Leprince mused, meantime fixing his eyes upon her. He was shocked to think of her position, the more so because he did not choose to expose himself to her friendship, he was conscious that it would have for him too perilous a fascination, and he sincerely loved his wife. Few men would

have acknowledged this self-suspicion, he did so, and saved himself from self-contempt. Still fewer would have reflected upon such an impalpable danger, until it came too near to be avoided.

"Well," he observed, rising, "I will bear your desire in my mind; I see many persons and hear of many things. I should also know what would suit you, my lady."

Hilda would have enjoyed a long conversation with Leprince, but she was not to have one—again he became invisible.

He brought none of his friends home to those little suppers for which he was so famous, the house was kept like a tower in a forest for the beautiful stranger. Hilda did not know that a concert took place while she was there, in London, and that Madame Leprince remained at home to entertain her, and missed one of those occasions which were the glory of her life. Julie was innocent and very generous, nor was she jealous of women fairer than herself, a charm of character itself a woman's crown. Round Hilda's heart

she insensibly grew, and her children clung there—the placid baby in particular screamed after her—an unexampled feat.

At the end of a week Leprince sent her a message by his wife to say he had heard of a situation which he believed would suit her.

Hilda would see Leprince himself.

"It is a young lady, Miss Grimstone, who desires a companion with distinguished manners. It was the very thing for my lady, for she lived in great retirement."

"And what should I have to do. I wish a great deal—"

"Enough, I dare say, for the lady is an invalid. A gentleman who was looking over some music asked one of my men, and he sent for me. It was the lady's cousin."

"He does not live in the house?" asked Hilda, in alarm.

"Oh, no, Madame, he lives in Regent Street, I believe. But he seemed very anxious about it, and I said there was a lady whom I knew."

"Yes, yes, I understand—it is quite right. And I shall write to her. I must have some name I suppose."

But Leprince suggested it would be better to go and call. The next day he drove her and Julie to Miss Grimstone's house, about ten miles from the furthest edge of London. Miss Grimstone was astonished at her, astonished at herself for securing her, yet did secure her forthwith. She was to go in four days, and thanks to Julie's French patterns, the small wardrobe she carried with her was as refined as had been her grand one in former days.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT is not a new observation that there are strange persons in the world. But most beings are regulated by a sort of consistency even in their oddities. Miss Grimstone was a character by herself, and very inconsistent.

Never had Hilda been so amazed as at her appearance. She was fresh as a cabbage rose, and stout and outspreading as a cabbage. She had limbs of that rustic type which we admire as we do the symmetry of a cart horse. She had strong dark hair and plenty of it, round black eyes, the whitest of teeth, the reddest cheeks, the clearest voice. Yet she was an invalid.

Miss Grimstone lived in her own house, left her by her mother, a handsome old abode in a noble old-fashioned garden. She had eight hundred pounds a-year besides, so that she was rich for a person in her class.

When Hilda arrived, under the name of Miss Warner, it was half-past seven o'clock. Miss Grimstone, who was sitting in her dining-room, in an ill-made muslin dress, shook hands with her very cordially, made her sit down, and began to talk about the pictures at the Royal Academy, which she had been that day to see. Hilda was wearied with her journey, for though she had dined at Leprince's, it had been a long drive. Miss Grimstone offered her neither tea nor coffee, and when the half-hour after eight struck, she observed that she always went to bed early, and had no doubt Miss Warner liked to do the same. "Because you are very pretty, and they say all the beauty sleep is before twelve o'clock."

Now it was one of those divine summer nights when it is very hard to go to bed at all, when

stately terraces are thronged with moonlit groups, and happy lovers steal into the shade. Everywhere a scent of lime-blossoms, and the ripe roses of middle June. Miss Grimstone rang the bell, up came a melancholy maid, in a white apron, with a lean and subdued countenance, bearing in her hands two candlesticks. A common lucifer match box lay in each. "For," said Miss Grimstone, "you may perhaps not want a light at all to-night, I believe the moon is full." She showed Hilda to her room, shook hands very warmly again, then went to hers, was soon in bed and fell asleep directly. But Hilda would not go to bed because she had been put into the room, she went down-stairs again. At their foot she met the maid coming up-stairs too.

"I wish to go into the garden," she observed.

"Mistress always has the doors bolted till she comes down in the morning."

Then Hilda rambled into the kitchen, everything was fast locked up, into the dining-room,

the closets were locked, the sideboard too. She was terribly faint and exhausted and drearily re-entered her room. But on unpacking the bag which Julie had filled for her use that night, she found a box of bonbons from Jules and Charlot, and a tin case of the wine biscuits for which Julie was famous. She thanked her in her heart, ate some of them and went to bed.

To bed! there was no bed, only a mattress which sloped very much in the middle, and rose very high at the sides. One would have said that the whole existence of some misanthrope had been consumed in making it uncomfortable by lying in it in one position. It was three o'clock before Hilda fell asleep.

Next morning the maid called her at six, and told her breakfast would be ready at seven. She rose of course, but, though she had made Julie teach her, she could scarcely dress herself, she was so stiff. When she went down, she found Miss Grimstone in a cloak and bonnet, just come in from a walk on the hills. There

was for breakfast brown bread and treacle, cold fish left from yesterday's dinner, good milk—Miss Grimstone got that for nothing from an old servant of her mother's who kept a cow. She observed that Hilda ate little, "Ah!" she exclaimed with enthusiasm, "you have lived in London. You must do as I do, and you'll soon get an appetite."

"What is your remedy?" asked Hilda kindly, for she was trying to behave like a companion.

"Drink eight glasses of spring water before breakfast—a full hour before—"

Hilda stared, she thought Miss Grimstone must be an insane invalid "Eight glasses! I could not drink more than one at any time, and before breakfast it would make me sick."

"Have you not heard of it? How strange! Everybody does it now—all the people of rank are going to Ben Rhydding and Malvern."

Unconsciously a hasty glance fell from the listener's eye. All the people of rank! what knew the speaker of them? But she saw Miss

Grimstone look surprised, and she was alarmed. She merely observed, "I should think it must be very disagreeable."

"Disagreeable? Delicious! pure, sparkling, the very cup of life!"

"I fear I should never appreciate it before breakfast, though I like cold water very much at any other time."

"See what an appetite it gives me."

Something had done so, for Miss Grimstone devoured bread and treacle like a hungry parish boy, and ate cold fish afterwards. Hilda only ate bread with her homœopathic cocoa, there was no aroma of tea; and instead of remonstrance or regret, Miss Grimstone glanced with satisfaction at her empty plate.

After breakfast Miss Grimstone requested Hilda to read to her, first the morning service, which she used, then a volume of Elihu Burritt's works. This young lady was as we said, a mixed curiosity. Her maid, who only remained with her because it was not easy to get

a character from Miss Grimstone, who knew of her early history—she had been betrayed poor thing, though she was sincerely penitent—her maid we say, confided to her friends that “Missis is all screw and self.” It was true—Miss Grimstone idolised her money, her cash-box was her bosom friend; but she also had that horror of dying which is peculiar to those whose spirits have never struck through the rind of flesh—incapable of aspiration towards Heaven, as they are of suffering upon earth. She was also so selfish that she would *not* be ill, would have health to enjoy life—she despised the sickly and the sad. Yet she was vain as all the selfish are, and inquisitive as are the underbred. She liked to know what was in books, she liked to say she knew. She contemplated Hilda’s reading to her as a saving convenience, because she made all her own clothes, and could not read at the same time; and she wanted a companion because she was too great a coward and too little poetical to bear to live alone.

And why did she live alone? there were pretty houses sprinkled on the hill, nay she had relations in some of them. Miss Grimstone never gave parties, it was too expensive, and of course no persons asked her to theirs except her own relations. To the houses of the latter she went, often uninvited, and always enjoyed whatever there was to eat, as she liked good things almost as well as common things—perhaps of the two she liked her own rude living best, as swine prefer mast to apricots.

There was one exception to her rule of receiving no company—her cousin, Harry Grimstone, whom she meant to marry some day, in case she did not find another suitor. She was under the conviction, that at some sea bathing place, or spa, or in the street, or at church, some nobleman or gentleman would fall in love with her. She also had some faith in doctors, and went to all the young physicians, but she found the consulting-room the most impracticable sphere of all. Meantime she practised a sort of courtship in

irons with Harry Grimstone, whom we shall presently introduce.

Hilda's silvery voice and richly cultured intonation surprised her, made her still more curious than her appearance had done. She had read two hours when Miss Grimstone proposed they should walk, just a little way, before dinner.

A little way? perhaps so for Miss Grimstone's large firm feet. But Hilda had to run by her side—uphill it was all the same, over stiles, and across ditches—places where she had better have gone on horseback. Hilda made this remark.

"My dear, I could not afford it—with the groom and all, and I should have to build a stable. The legs are best. Why, under Dr. Gammon I walked eight hours a day, and I was obliged to leave off because it wore out so many boots—and my appetite, why I could never get enough!"

Miss Grimstone questioned Hilda about herself, but received answers so guarded and commonplace, that she grew cross. She was too healthy, however, to be cross long, and resumed

her selfish chatter. By the time they turned to go home Hilda could walk no more, and espying a donkey equipage returning the same way slowly, she said she would return in it.

"Have you your purse?" Miss Grimstone enquired.

"Yes, certainly," answered Hilda, not a little surprised.

So she drove home in the donkey-chaise led by a boy, and Miss Grimstone pranced on foot and got home first.

Well, when Hilda reached home Miss Grimstone was nowhere to be seen, but in about twenty minutes the maid rapped at the door.

"Please, Miss, Missis's love, and would you come to see her in pack?"

Hilda was wroth at the "love," and felt disinclined to go, but immediately supposing her employer either was packing a box or desired her to pack one, she went.

In a room without a carpet there was a bedstead without curtains, and on the bedstead a

mattress, and on that mattress a large symmetrical heap. It was rolled tight, close and neat, yet had a puffy appearance, which might have suggested a mummy that had died of dropsy. Like the strange abortions in certain German fairy-tales, it possessed a human head, a head with a round perspiring face, which blandly smiled upon its own captivity. It was Miss Grimstone in pack. *Now* every person in every rank has heard of this process, *then* such was Lady Thanet's benighted condition, she had not. In the middle of the room was a large tin bath, and the floor was adorned with splashes.

The dreamy rapture of the victim's expression was such that Hilda dared not disturb her. She addressed instead the maid, who was present on the refreshing occasion.

"Why how is it all done, and what is it?"

"The sheet, miss, is wrung out of cold water, I do it myself, and wrapped round and round her body, and two blankets next, Miss, dry, and

more blankets, and atop of that the feather bed, and atop of that—”

“ Will she not take cold?” interrupted Hilda.

“ No, Miss, missis says it’s very ‘ot. Missis gets in the bath afterwards and I pour water over her.”

The scarlet face by this time shone; the moist eyelids closed, Miss Grimstone was asleep. So Hilda left her room, wondering much why anyone who looked so well, should waste so much time in seeking what she had not lost.

When Miss Grimstone was dried and dressed, she came down to dinner. There was no wine, of course, cold water, of course; boiled mutton with nasturtiums out of the garden instead of caper sauce; loads of vegetables. Miss Grimstone ate a meal for an elephant, and Hilda soon learned to eat more at dinner, for there was only homoeopathic cocoa, bread and treacle, and perhaps watercress, afterwards.

After dinner Miss Grimstone went out again,

though she suffered Hilda to remain at home, saying, "I'll soon make you strong enough to walk twice a day." So Hilda went to sleep on the horsehair sofa in the dining-room. After tea Miss Grimstone worked, really worked in her garden. No gardener for her; true, there were weeds on the walks and stones in the borders, but she dug beds for her potatoes, plucked the leaves from her wall fruit trees, and watered her strawberry beds. Miss Grimstone made a good deal by her garden; she sold her roses and lavender to the chemists for *pot pourri*, and her strawberries to a man who had a stall in Covent Garden Market.

There were the bonbons this night for supper, and Hilda remembered those dear children in her prayers, which, whether those of the erring or the faithful, were sincere. Next morning at six, the maid knocked.

"Please, Miss, missis is gone out. Her love, and will you drink four glasses to begin with?"

The maid had a waiter in her hand, on which

stood a quart jug and a tumbler. These she brought to the bedside, and from long habit, she poured the water into the glass.

“Take it away this moment,” exclaimed Hilda. The maid started back in affright at her impetuous tones.

“I beg your pardon, my good girl, but I cannot drink it.”

“No more couldn’t I, Miss; missis ordered it me once when my chest was bad, but the first three glasses laid so chill on my stomach, that (whispering) I poured the rest down the sink!”

“But what is the matter with your mistress? she seems quite well.”

“No one knows, Miss; she says the doctor don’t. But this won’t go on long, this water, Miss; things don’t never here.”

“What, the water drinking? was there anything else before?”

“Law, Miss! everythink. First there was them medicines, very small little things, and white powders. The small little things she

swallowed on her tongue, the powders in a glass of water with a piece of writing paper over the tumbler. Then a man come wandering along with 'erbs. Missis had him into the parlor. She saw him a long time. And she had 'erbs, fennel and thyme, and camomiles, and mint and aniseed, and pennyryal—everythink almost except onions—boiled and boiled, and simmered, and drank it in quarts and quarts, and washed her head with it. And I think she ate grass, but I ain't sure. Then missis went to Brighton, and she come back and teached me how to rub her. She'd been to a lady there, who rubs the Queen."

"Rubs the Queen; what nonsense!"

"Leastways one of the Queen's ladies. But Missis used to strip her clothes down her back, and I used to rub, rub, rub, till the skin came off my hands worse than a washing day; and Missis just the same, walking about. Then she had brandy and salt, but the brandy came too expensive, and then she ate only vegetables, but

she soon left off that, for she likes meat; and then Missis said she was weak for want of meat, and she went to Morven, and then, when she come back, this water."

Such was the narration of the maid of all work of Miss Grimstone.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next day was Sunday. Miss Grimstone had asked Hilda the night before whether she should like to hear Dr. Croly preach, she was going herself to walk five miles to hear him. Hilda thanked her, but said she could not walk, and that she would rather spend a quiet morning. When she came down to breakfast, Miss Grimstone was gone, having breakfasted at six, that she might be in plenty of time to examine the people in church before she attended to the business that took her there.

Hilda went into the garden, and soon longed to get out of it, beyond it into the fields. She

found a gate at the bottom, locked, and called to the maid, who was plucking peas for dinner. The maid went and fetched the key, and opened it, for Miss Grimstone could not carry all her keys to church, so she only carried the patent key of her cash-box.

Hilda walked slowly across the sunny fields with the warm grass under her feet. She meditated—her soul wrestled with its sadness, her conscience with its burden, which could scarcely be named sin. That love for purity which had forced her to leave Gutilyn, now whispered peace to her conscience and her soul. The blue heaven, so brilliant and so deep, was the shadow of the purity which was her spirit's passion. Why then did the melancholy return upon her? That shadow was an unpierced veil; and beyond it, within it only, could perfect purity be found. It dwelt not with her thought, it was dreamed not with her imagination; only to be seen in the invisible, only to be realised through One whose manhood had become divine. She knew all this,

but could not feel it yet, could only feel how hard it was to have nothing to love on earth. Heaven pardons that weakness which men despise.

But there was no wind, and no stir in the air except the wings of the white butterflies; the hot sun drove her into the shade. There was a lane at the bottom of the field, where an oak sprang here and there; under one of these oaks she sat, and thought back through her life, which was to her a mystery, the greatest mystery—her child's life and death. She was recalling almost as a dream her own infancy, when she heard an infant cry. Close at hand—behind the hedge it seemed, and her heart leaped to it; she must seek it, find it, and hold it in her arms. She rose and looked all round; there was a little cottage beyond the stile, the other side of the lane—so little a cottage that she had not perceived it; she crossed the stile, and opened the little gate, a few steps brought her to the door; she knocked with her hand. An

old woman opened it, looking very cross, but she smiled when she saw Hilda's face; she allowed her to enter the small low room.

"Is there not a baby here? I thought I heard its cry."

"Yes, Ma'am, my daughter's, she was trying to get about a bit in the sun in the back yard. Will you please to be seated, Ma'am?"

"Yes; and may I see the baby?"

The woman gave Hilda one of the three wooden chairs, which, with a deal table, a shelf of plates and mugs, and a broken pitcher containing three blue flag flowers, made up the whole furniture.

In a minute the daughter entered, looking pale, and having a somewhat wandering glance, the expression peculiar to a convalescent who cannot get generous food.

The baby was beautifully clean, but wore a coarse blue gingham gown. Hilda took it in her arms and gazed upon it, its large hungry eyes gazed up at her.

"How sweet it would look in white," she observed with perfect innocence: "and what a pity it does not wear a cap. It would be so pretty in a cap, all round its face."

"Dear ma'am," exclaimed the grandmother, glancing at Hilda's rich dress—she had on that day the dress she had escaped in—one of those levantines that never wear out, "poor Bessie could not afford white, nor caps; when the child came she had nothing to wrap it in except one of her old aprons."

"But what is the reason? are you so very poor, and why?"

"*Why*, ma'am, the Lord knows who makes rich and poor, at least they say so, and it's not for such as me to say His creatures have anything to do with it. Bessie was a happy wife, ma'am, and the house so comfortable, and all within a year——" here she wept, the young mother had gone to weep her weakness out in the sun.

"Did she love her husband—where is he?"

"He went to the Lord, ma'am, last harvest—a stroke, ma'am, in the reaping time. You remember that time, ma'am, it was a judgment, so awful hot. But he lay ill six weeks with his head, and the parish doctor he come twice; but Bessie, ma'am, like a wife, wasn't satisfied, she said he only come because ordered, and that he took no pains. After he died, Bessie sold all the little things she had made for the baby, that he might be buried by his own people, and it was her only comfort, ma'am, and is now, that she paid for his coffin herself. But she fretted and fretted after, and could do nothing, and all the washing that ever I got to do, why it was just enough for bread and no more. One thing went after another, for we'd never begged before, and Bessie said, please the Lord she never would. But when the baby was born I set off by myself and says nothing to her, and went to a lady whose ma' I used to wash for, just anent the field."

"What is that lady's name?"

"Miss Grimstone, ma'am; I don't mean to

complain, but what do you think she give me?"

"I do not know—tell me."

"A great jug of camomile tea, and two of her old petticoats, and a old nightgown. Well, ma'am, I cut out and made them up myself, sitting up all night, and the things was so rotten they come to pieces the first washing."

"And she gave you no money?"

"She don't never give money, ma'am, she says the poor all spend it in drink; but she don't spend it for them, ma'am, neither. The clergyman's wife she was very kind, and come three miles to bring some things, but Lord, ma'am, she has nine children herself, and not rich. The poor gentlefolk give away the most, but they must consider their own."

"I am going to give you something, as much as I can, but I am poor too," said Hilda. A deep chill struck to her heart. Oh! that she had known, when rich, of such things as these! why had they not told her of them?

The woman glanced again at her dress, her delicate gloves, the gloss of her golden hair. She drew out a plain silk purse, she had given her little gold one, internetted with small diamonds, to Julie for a keepsake.

There were but ten guineas in it now; she gave all but two to the grandmother, whose face of terrified pleasure nothing can describe. Hilda was astonished ; she had been accustomed to think of sovereigns as most do of shillings.

“ I will try to make some clothes for the baby, very pretty white things and caps,” she observed, a promise not very likely to be fulfilled, for she had never learned to work; however she thought it must be very easy. She left the cottage, quite unconscious of the blessings, prayers, tears, that were poured out upon her, her whole heart was full as her memory of the beautiful little dresses, in their sandal-wood press at Champian, the rosettes and the broideries, the cambrics and laces of her dead baby—the heaps of jewels she might not touch, the gold and silver treasure, no

more her own—that too at the time when she had received the first lesson how to use it.

When she arrived inside Miss Grimstone's garden, the maid, who had been watching for her, ran towards her, with her stringless Sunday cap half off her head.

“Please Miss, Mr. ’Arry—”

“What do you mean; I do not understand?”

“Oh, miss! I quite forgot to tell you, and ast your pardon, but missis before she went out sent her love to you, and if Mr. ’Arry come, would you be so kind as to take care of him till she come home?”

“Take care of him!—are you mad? I don’t even know of whom you are speaking!”

“Mr. ’Arry Grimstone, Miss, missis’s cousin. He come sometimes on Sunday, but mostly on rainy ones; the fine ones he hardly ever does. I thought he’d have been sure not to have come to-day.”

“I cannot see any gentleman; tell him I am engaged.”

"But, Miss, he ast me if dinner was near ready; he's hungry."

"Serve dinner to him then, but I shall not come down."

So Hilda set forth up the garden, with her stately Spanish walk. But down the garden there approached a figure which desired to familiarise itself with her appearance. This form stepped behind a rose-bush, and through its eye-glass scrutinised her.

"What a stunning lovely creature!" it observed to itself. "By Jove!—by — what a face! Boned from some harem. How corky Bell must be—but the style's beyond her, perhaps. Where the deuce did Leprince pick her up, and what did he get rid of her for, with his slap-up taste? What a jolly reward to me for coming in full fig, all through the dust! And Bell out, too—glorious!"

Here he advanced, and made a deep bow, really an elegant bow, for Hilda's grace subdued his vanity.

He was a tall, well-made young man, dressed exceedingly well, rather as Gutilyn used to dress, only that Gutilyn looked like a deteriorated nobleman, and Harry Grimstone's polish was the full bloom of vulgarity. His boots were perfect, his shirt was perfect, his tie, his coat, all were from the best places. His well-shaped hands were smooth as new wax; his nails were lustrous. He had Miss Grimstone's high colour, and was of her large type, but he had fastidious, if full lips, and a disagreeable discernment looked forth from his bright eyes.

Hilda, on seeing him, took no notice, did but barely return his bow, and walked on over the grass; he walking behind her, apprised (as he well knew how) the value of her silk dress, of her delicate boots, the beauty of her feet and ankles. For he was at once a connoisseur of the most ideal feminine charms, and of the most material articles of their adornment. He was not rude, however, for he knew she was no common person; he did not dare to be.

He waited in the garden till the maid announced dinner; he carved most delicately for Hilda, who persisted in having her plate carried upstairs to her; and having eaten as much roast beef and Yorkshire pudding as he could, he went out again to smoke. For Miss Grimstone had carried with her a scrip of sandwiches and a bottle of water, to be taken in the vestry between the services.

Harry Grimstone was foreman of the first house in Regent Street for mercery, haberdashery, and millinery. He had a capital salary and splendid rooms over the immense shop, whose owner lived at Richmond, had a park, a yacht, and a stud. All Harry Grimstone had to do was to see that the hundred young men behaved like educated monkeys to the grand ladies who made the shop their lounge in the afternoons during the season. He was required to act master of the ceremonies when they entered, and when they returned to their carriages to see them into them. He had all his time to himself when the carriage time

was over, and all his mornings till it arrived, for then he was accustomed to shirk his duties and depute the most high-cultured of the apes to act for him. He had not been ill-educated, and had possessed two thousand pounds which his mother had saved for him out of an annuity of two hundred a-year for twenty years—he was a year old when his father died. His mother hoped it would secure him a position as a professional man, but he had gone on the continent and spent it in six months. He was glad enough to take this situation, which indeed reduced him no lower than his level, though it fostered his selfishness, and marred all hopes of his improvement. He was called Beau Grim by his friends, partly because he knew where to buy his clothes and how to put them on, and partly because he affected cynicism, and about the fair sex was positively fastidious. He had the impudence to prefer to all portraits the historic one of Beatrice Cenci; nothing could be for his taste too refined, too lofty in type or spiritual in expression.

In his room he had hung the most exquisite pictures of the fairest women, and nurtured his dreams upon them. But these aspiring fancies kept him, of course, a single man; he scarcely ever admired the ladies of rank who thronged the vista of the shop, gilt and glittering almost as their own drawing rooms. And he had thoughts remote of marrying Bell Grimstone, for he knew no one else would marry her, and would not have objected to her money. She lived, however, in so slow a style, that there was no occasion to remind himself of securing her—he merely kept his eye upon her as we see.

Hilda was obliged to come down to tea, as Miss Grimstone sent the maid for her, but Harry would not have admired her as openly as his manner showed, had he known she would leave the room in consequence, which she did directly the table was cleared. Much disappointed, he observed to Bell, “That girl will never do for you, she’s idle and conceited, and lackadaisical

besides." He knew Bell would be more likely to keep her if he expressed disapproval.

"I don't see that at all, she is of a fair complexion and has lived in town. She is useful to me already, and reads beautifully. Then she is not noisy, noisy people make me nervous."

"How do you know she has lived in London, my dear girl?"

"I suppose she has; didn't she come from Leprince's? You told me so."

"Ah, true! so she did. Well you must try and give her some of your natural rouge. I must be moving now—good-night."

He knew there was no supper in store for him, and was afraid to see Hilda again that night, for Bell had watched him, despite his depreciation, when he spoke of her.

CHAPTER XX.

HILDA became a real companion to Miss Grimstone in a few days, doing what she directed, reading when she pleased to order her, even drinking cold water before breakfast, even walking after it, and walking at all hours in which her employer desired her company. She was like Soimême in the fairy-tale to that lady, so much so that Miss Grimstone began to discover she was not amusing, however useful. A life of penance alone seemed fitted to Hilda in her present frame; she was thankful for it, and yet it did not satisfy her. True she grew paler than ever, her head was held the haughtier to endure

its weak throbings, weariness weighed on her all hours, so that morning, noon, and night she felt spent. This was not the cause of her suffering, and the cause she could not name because her pride would not suffer her to call it up from the depths of her being, where it lay lower than all consciousness—it was as the darkness of death in her soul.

Harry Grimstone came the next Sunday and the next, and the next. Bell became nervous, thinking that her charms had all at once become too much for him, and though very vain of the excitement of her unexpected conquest, she forced herself to be more severe, more restrained than ever towards him, for she had not given up the fixed idea which we have mentioned concerning the nobleman, gentleman, or clergyman, she was to impress by chance. Harry, all the while thinking of a very different person, was all the kinder and more cousinly towards her; and what frightened her into the furthest recesses of reserve, was the fact that he sent on Saturdays

presents of game and fish, for he knew he ate a great deal, and that Bell did not like her guests to do so—perhaps because she ate so much herself—thus he provided his own dinner.

Of course when Bell was at home, which she took care to be after the first time, Hilda was obliged to dine with them. She never addressed him, but he persisted in making observations to her, to which she replied in haughty accents with downcast eyes; not that the possibility of his daring to admire her ever crossed her mind, but because his countenance was extremely unpleasant to her. He meantime had fallen as much in love as he could be, with as much singleness of heart as he was capable of, and so blinded was he by the near dazzle of loveliness which he, at a distance, would only have dared to worship, that he mistook her calm and colourless disdain for suppressed emotion and the virgin white of modesty. Many and many a time he sauntered into Leprince's, and coaxed and tormented him to give him information concerning the origin

and circumstances of his cousin's companion, but Leprince baffled him completely by his concise and unvarying reply that he knew nothing of her before she applied to him to procure her a situation. This was literally true as we know, but Harry Grimstone did not believe it, and always revenged himself first by telling Leprince he had no right to recommend a person he did not know, and secondly by breathing into all the flutes, scraping all the fiddles, and producing squeaks from all the concertinas in the shop.

It was many weeks before Harry Grimstone could obtain an interview with Hilda alone, for he was afraid Bell would send her away if she so much as suspected his interest. In that case he might lose all chance of ever seeing her again he thought, for he was obliged to allow that if she did affect him it was in the most feminine and unobtrusive manner—a sentiment requiring constant stimulus. But he had no misgivings that the magnanimous proposal of his hand, which he proposed to make, would not be re-

ceived with rapture and gratitude; he knew enough of everyday women to be aware how thankfully they accept a home which promises ease from work and worry; he thought he knew enough of rare women to be certain they, more than any, would accept it, because requiring it more absolutely.

One Saturday Bell caught a cold, whether from air or water she could not tell, but it failed to vanish before her newly adopted remedies. In a fright, therefore, she remained in bed on Sunday, and permitted herself tea for breakfast, being thirsty from the soreness of her throat. Harry Grimstone came as usual, and sent her up a message about a medicine some friend of his had tried with success for the same symptoms, and offered to go to Town and fetch it from the chemist, bringing it back himself. Bell was delighted to hear of anything new in the way of drugs (to which she always sneaked back when she felt really ill). So the servant went down and instructed him to procure it.

Hilda believed he had gone, for she heard the door close, and seeing that Bell had fallen asleep in the soothing prospects, she went out of her room where she had been the whole morning, to breathe the fresh air for a few moments. She went into the garden, walking slowly with her eyes downcast, her usual habit lately, so that she reached the summer house without perceiving its inmate. For Harry Grimstone, knowing Bell was safe in bed, had given the maid half-a-crown and sent her to London for the physic, that he might have a chance of meeting Hilda alone. He had been smoking at the bottom of the garden, when he saw her leave the house, and having thrown his cigar away and swallowed a fragrant bonbon, he crept into the summer house to wait for her.

Meeting him full, as she could not help doing, it was a singular scene. The moment he touched upon the subject in his thoughts, she realised all he meant; she recoiled as only a woman in her false position would do, then seemed petrified

into a calmness which disconcerted him. Without speech or blush she turned from him, and wrung her hands, then walked back towards the house; taking no heed of his warm words, bewildered protestations, tender promises. What manner of maiden might she be, that he dared not detain her—that he dared only walk at her side, not near it either? She actually could not answer him, even he felt that, for she glanced at him in despair, a despair that while it denied him all his hopes, implored his compassion in return.

But when she reached her room her own imprudence struck her. She feared he suspected her—of what? of that she alone knew. She therefore wrote a short letter thanking him courteously for what she refused coldly; and this note she sent down by the maid, who, returning with the medicine, brought it to her to administer to the patient. Right thankful was she when the maid came up, and said Mr. Harry was gone.

Mr. Harry was much dejected for a day or

two, for the letter, short as it was, assured him it was sincere.

He was too used to coquetry in every phase to be able on such grounds to explain it, but he was not so much chagrined as he might have been, because the mental terror of the writer had disguised her personal dislike. Soon, therefore, he rallied a little, and his faculties recovering their balance, reminded him how pleasant revenge would be—revenge for such treatment, by a beautiful woman not worth a stiver, who had no certificate of character either. He was in this mood on Friday afternoon, when by one of those chances on which hangs the creed of the Fatalist, two ladies entered the shop. He had been so absorbed in his reveries of his revenge that he had not been in time to receive them as they left their carriage; now he rushed forwards and presented them with chairs, for he knew them; they were Lady Hulse and Mrs. St. Leonard, the former having given the latter what she termed “a lift.”

They were seated; a sheen of rainbow silks were outspread before their eyes, and mysterious boxes opened upon the counter. Beau Grim-stone lingered near the chair of Mrs. St. Leonard; it was one of his diversions to hear what absurdities she would utter. This time, however, she was subdued—almost sad; she tried on gloves with a pensive air, while Lady Hulse who affected tasteless apparel as a proof of intellect, chose *moire antique*, the color of coffee grounds, and sere velvet leaves to trim it with. Presently Mrs. St. Leonard sighed, and tossed all the gloves down, as though she could no more of vanity; then she began to talk in French. Now Beau Grim understood French when he heard English persons speak it, though he pronounced it villainously, as most English persons do. He did not catch the first sentence, however, it was something about "Lady—poor Lady something." So he drew a few steps nearer, and inclined his ear.

"Has anything been heard of her?" asked

Lady Hulse, "I have been so long at Roseneath, that I have got behind the age."

"Nothing," answered Mrs. St. Leonard, "I believe she is dead. Poor dear Lord Thanet, such a blow! It completely stunned him at first, and his kind amiable relatives sent for me. It was little I could do, but I tried to rouse him. And now it is worse than ever—he raves for her. But he is such a husband!"

"I should not have thought so, indeed my maid tells me strange stories."

"My dear Lady Hulse, for a woman like you to listen to your maid! But you geniuses are always the victims of your too sensitive hearts; the meanest appeal reaches you. Well, let me tell you they are all mistaken, the young man is of an angelic nature—little understood, little understood."

"He does not look like an angel, it must be confessed. He has a Robespierre skull."

"Ah, prejudice! prejudice! He is tenderly amiable; in manners most distinguished, of course

calm. But his only fault is a too fond partiality for his misguided wife, he even accuses himself."

"But I quite expected to hear she had returned. You wrote me word that you expected to take her back yourself."

"Most extraordinary indeed, the whole affair. It was entirely my own doing she was traced at all, and had I been consulted sooner there is not a doubt but that she would have been enjoying the undeserved blessing of her husband's love once more. At the hotel where she certainly was the morning I was called upon I did not find her, she had gone out."

Here Mrs. St. Leonard lowered her voice, but even her whisper was harsh and loud. "My man swore she went into Leprince's, for a sweeper told him, and those sort of creatures are never mistaken. But I could get nothing out of Leprince, though I offered him to name his own terms—anything. He braved me out, and would allow nothing except that a lady had

called to see his wife. The very dress was described—*ponceau* silk and Russian shawl—but what was strange, Leprince's young men all persisted too; and those intolerable police, who are never in the way at the right time, were all in a silversmith's after a fellow who was pocketing snuff-boxes."

Harry Grimstone was naturally sharp, and his faculties were sharpened by his excitement. Leprince—who had recommended to him his cousin's companion without knowing where she had come from! And *ponceau* silk, the very colour of the dress she had worn the first Sunday he saw her. This might explain all! but shame upon his knightly shield, the knowledge of her high position struck an unworthy courage into his heart. Very naturally she had rejected him—she was obliged to do so—it would be very different upon other terms. The spiteful falsehoods concerning her, uttered by a woman whom he knew to be accustomed to speak falsely, now acted upon him with the force of truth. She

had no right to refuse him now, he was holier, better, more wise than she. Neither would he treat her too delicately, she did not deserve it.

On Tuesday he went to his cousin's, hoping Bell would be still in bed. But Bell was up; still it was a convenient circumstance that, wrapped in a great shawl, she had proposed to herself to dig a bed in the kitchen garden, in order to procure a natural bath, as she termed perspiration. It was also fortunate that she did not expect Harry, we mean that he considered it so, as she was out of the way, and could not see Hilda, whom she had set to paint the round table in the summer-house, the summer-house being between the two gardens.

Harry obtained this information from the maid, and had ordered her back to her kitchen, saying he would introduce himself to her mistress. He did, of course, no such thing, he stole over the grass plot into the summer-house, and felt gratified to see the woman he admired toiling with the heavy brush she knew not how to manage, and

with delicate fingers dyed in green paint. But the calm, haughty paleness with which she returned his greeting, without rising from her work, disturbed his intention of addressing her with familiarity once again.

He stopped and observed respectfully: "I wish to speak to you one moment on business—will you permit me to do so now?"

She bowed again; still knelt. For though at the first moment alarmed, and reminded as she always was if addressed by a stranger, of her husband, she reflected the instant after that it was quite impossible a person like Harry Grimstone should know of the existence of the Earl of Thanet.

Very warily (as he thought) he added: "I suppose my cousin Bell told you it was *I* who enquired at Leprince's for a companion for her!"

Alarmed again, she glanced nervously in his face. But she read nothing there except the look of admiration she detested—why should she fear to confess Leprince had recommended

her? Still she scarcely knew what to say. He fixed himself against the side of the summer-house and folded his arms; it was evident he meant to stay.

"I do not remember whether Miss Grimstone spoke of you in connection with the matter. It signifies very little whether M. Leprince recommended me to you or to her."

"So long as you are here, eh? I think so of course." His tone was changed. Hilda's disgust overcame her, and she rose from her kneeling position and prepared to go. Rudely enough he detained her, by placing his arm across the entrance. "Not yet, fair lady, I have not done catechising you. My cousin is very careless. So is Leprince to recommend a young person he does not know. I told him so, and as I could get nothing out of him I have come to you. Pray are you a relation of his?"

"It is not your affair; I shall not tell you."

"It is my affair, and you shall tell me." Here he placed himself before the door—to avoid him

as far as possible she shrunk into the seat—the table was between them.

“Really Madam, this mystery is very entertaining. One would say you are incognito, that you have left your home—perhaps something more.”

She tried to face him, and could have done so but for the vulgar attitude he had adopted, and his insufferable eyes bent full upon her. The color deepened in her lips, paler and paler mounted the terror, into the edges of her golden hair. Her heart beat so sharply, that involuntarily she pressed her hand to it. He saw his advantage—he leaned across the table, and exclaimed authoritatively, “You see I know all—I can betray you at any moment!”

This was a falsehood, as we know, he had barely guessed it; but it answered his purpose just at present. And the crisis roused her, with the shock her strength returned.

“I am very unfortunate, and I am sure you are generous enough to pity me.”

She said this on purpose to beguile him: she hoped by acting upon his vanity to prevent his speaking to Miss Grimstone; she cared scarcely what he knew, for as soon as he was gone that day, could she not again take flight? Farther, farther this time, into some desert beyond the sea.

"Does she know Harry Grimstone so well?" he answered with a tender accent, and advancing to seat himself beside her. "I will not indeed betray you, on one condition—that you will confide entirely in me."

With the greatest effort she mastered her contempt. "You will excuse me to-day I know, I am too much agitated to speak of my misfortunes."

"Then we will speak of something else."

We can guess what followed. No punishment for any crime could be so terrible as this consequence of her flight from the shelter of her home. Could it be a crime, to be so punished? She knew not; she only felt through

the passion of indignant modesty and insulted pride, that she was lost if she treated him as she ought—as he deserved. Not that she replied to him, she only hid her face and trembled, but she allowed him to say what he pleased, she did not dare to go. At the end, when he urged a reply, she promised to decide that day, and to write him word of her decision. He still importuned, and was doing so when Bell appeared round the corner of the summer-house with her tools in her hand.

Miss Grimstone's honour was of that order which picks up an open letter and reads it, though it will not compromise itself by breaking the seal of one—which does not plant itself to listen behind doors, but gladly listens when Fate plants it in that position. After her bed was dug, she had walked about lest she should take cold, and being cooled she had come up the garden intending to hold her head under the pump and drink. She heard voices in the summer-house as she approached it, and paused,

assuming to herself that she was counting her lettuces, but actually listening, and she heard nearly all the conversation.

Harry was of course very awkward when he saw her; she, on the contrary, preserved her usual manner, and was no redder in the face than usual. She pretended to be surprised to see him, of course, but also charmed; yet she took care he should have no chance of seeing Hilda alone, and she also took care Hilda should not get out of her sight. He would not stay to dinner, he was too much discomfited; but Hilda's calm manner when she bowed to him adieu deceived him into the fancy that she would actually write to him. It must be added that he did not expect much more.

Bell never did anything disagreeable before dinner, nor for an hour afterwards, lest it might interfere with her digestion; but about four o'clock she solemnly commanded Hilda to join her in her room. She read her then a lecture in terms which would make this paper blush. Un-

der the circumstances it was perhaps highly creditable to her, had she not ended by excusing herself for allowing Harry Grimstone to visit her, by saying she trusted pure female influence might restore him to the paths of virtue.

But nothing can express the agony of Hilda's mind in deceiving a woman—any other woman—about her own feelings. For she was obliged to deceive her still. It was a blessing for which she could have embraced Bell, when that young lady dismissed her from her service, for it saved her another ignoble adventure, so she thought.

Miss Grimstone observed that she supposed she had some friends to go to?

"Certainly," said she with energy, for she remembered the last words of Leprince and Julie, that whenever she might need a home she would find a welcome with them. "And," added Hilda, "I should prefer to go to-night."

Then Bell fidgetted. "Wait a moment, Miss Warner," she exclaimed with dignity. "Some

persons would not pay you had they detected you in such a fearful position." For Bell had put it upon her conscience that having caught a word, she had felt it right to listen; "a painful duty, imposed on me as a woman, by Providence. I shall pay you," added Bell, "and I hope it may be the means of preserving you from temptation."

"I do not want any money," said Hilda, whose last sovereign lay at the bottom of her purse.

"Absurd!" said Miss Grimstone with grandeur. "You will write me word when you reach your destination, and I shall forward you a check. If I gave you the money to take with you some pickpocket would rob you on the line."

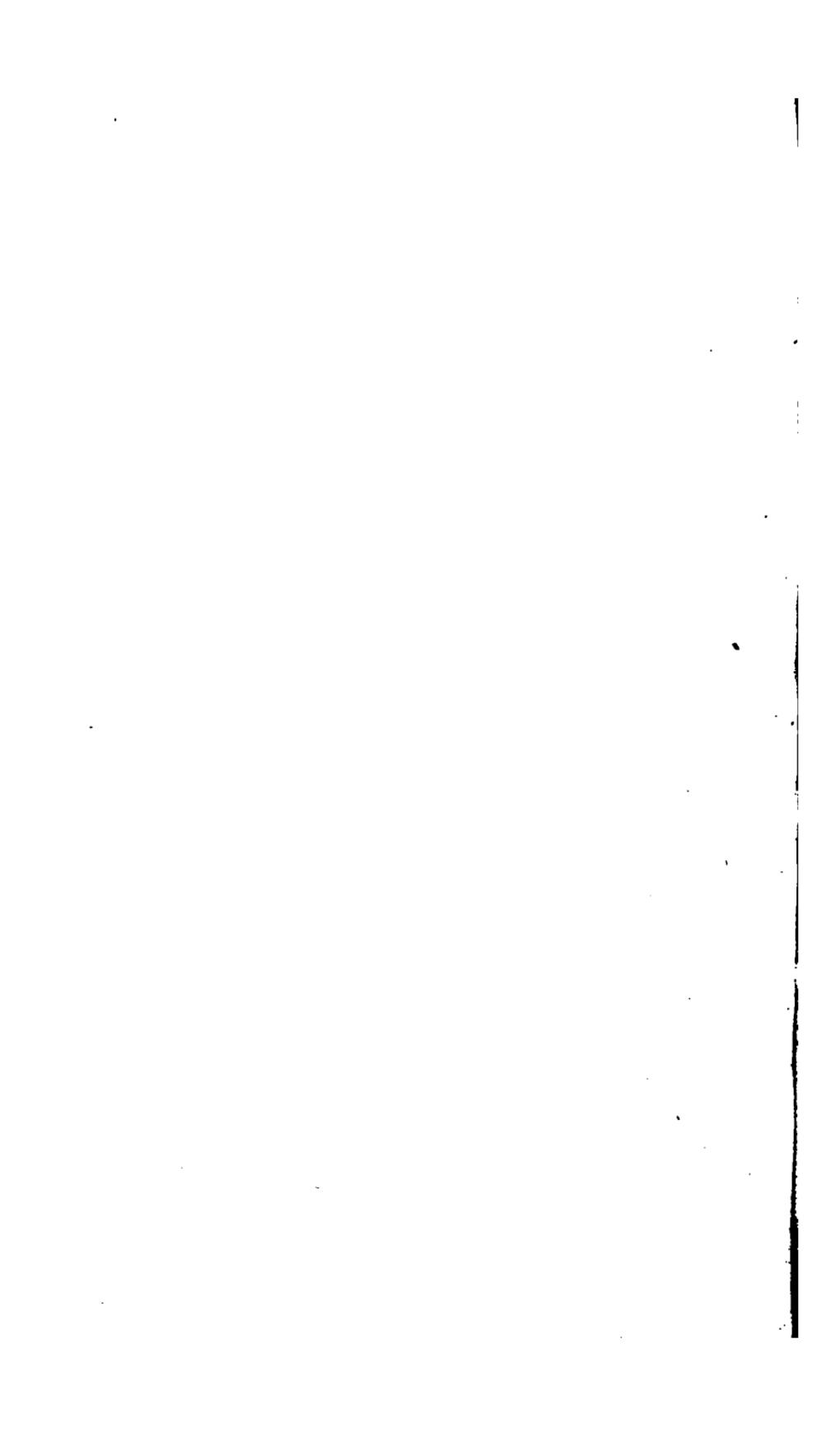
Hilda packed her few clothes—at least the maid did, for she as well knew how to fly. The maid wept much, and Hilda gave her her best dress—the *ponceau* silk—for a keepsake. A musty cabriolet came from the solitary inn of the village, also fetched by the maid, and Hilda, having taken leave of Miss Grimstone, who did

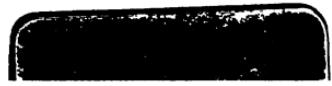
not shake hands with her, was conveyed to the little lonely railway station that heard the wind in an everlasting gust, sweep up and down the line. Half-an-hour between banks and tan-pits, brought her to London Bridge.

END OF VOL. I.









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